

MY PATH TO ISLAM

AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM
REVERT STORIES

*"Truly strong is the Grip (and Power) of thy Lord.
It is He Who creates from the very beginning, and He can
restore (life).
And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Full of loving kindness, Lord of
the Throne of Glory,
Doer (without let) of all that He intends."*

Qur'an 85:12-15

Islam-Australia has been responsible for the gathering and compilation of these stories of Muslim revert. This is an organisation dedicated to bringing truth and understanding of Islam to the thousands of Australians, whose vision has been clouded by misrepresentation of Allah; the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace be upon him); the Glorious Qur'an, the Word of Allah; and of Islam itself, the religion of Allah and all His Prophets and Messengers. In so doing we also recognise the work carried out by Islam-Australia team members, who are light bearers of Islam in this era. May it please Almighty Allah to grant them the joy of fruitfulness in their endeavours.

This publication is a collection of stories of brothers and sisters in faith who put pen to paper in a bid to tell and encourage each other and mankind with stories of Allah's care and leading, Alhamdulillah.

Published by:

Islam Australia

www.islam-australia.net

&

Goodword Media

Shop 1 A, Auburn Arcade

75-77 Auburn Rd

Auburn NSW 2144

Ph: 02 9643 8790

ISBN: 0-9581681-2-1

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Australian Muslim Revert Stories

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www.goodword.com.au

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First Edition 2004-04-29

ISBN: 0-9581681-2-1

Published by:

Islam Australia
www.islam-australia.net

and

Goodword Media
70 O'Brien St, Mt Druitt NSW 2770
www.goodword.com.au
email: info@goodword.com.au

Printed at:

Crown Printing Press,
Srinagar – Kashmir
Phone: + 91 194 2451249

*For more information about ISLAM
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or
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Please Note:

Any views expressed in this book do not necessarily represent the views of Islam-Australia.

Acknowledgement

All praise to Allah Most Gracious, Most Merciful, Who, Alone, brings forgiveness and light and new life to those who call upon Him; and to Him is the dedication of this book.

"Truly strong is the Grip (and Power) of thy Lord.

It is He Who creates from the very beginning, and He can restore (life). And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Full of loving kindness, Lord of the Throne of Glory, Doer (without let) of all that He intends."

Qur'an 85:12-15

We praise Allah for His great loving kindness which has brought us all together to tell and encourage each other and mankind with stories of His care and leading. In so doing, we also give thanks for those who answered His call, who have started their journey upon the Straight Path of Allah.

We gratefully acknowledge these brothers and sisters in faith who have given of themselves in the telling of their experiences. May their reward with Allah be great.

Islam-Australia (www.islam-australia.net) has been responsible for the gathering and compilation of these stories of Muslim revert. This is an organisation dedicated to bringing truth and understanding of Islam to the thousands of Australians who have no true knowledge; whose vision has been clouded by misrepresentation of Allah; the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace be upon him); the Glorious Qur'an, the Word of Allah; and of Islam itself, the religion of Allah and all His Prophets and Messengers. In so doing we also recognise the work carried out by Islam-Australia team members, who are light bearers of Islam in this era. May it please Almighty Allah to grant them the joy of fruitfulness in their endeavours.

As for the book itself, Sister Tuba Boz, on researching the position of Australian Reverts for her Honours thesis, was responsible for bringing together many of those who have given their stories. Thus her work has strongly influenced the compilation of this book. We gratefully acknowledge her help and the effort she has put into this publication, including the writing of the introduction. May Allah, upon Whom we depend, grant her great reward now and in the future.

Another sister whose help and constancy in the scriptural research for this work,

has been Sister Nasirah Cavaney. Mr. and Mrs. Ali have also been instrumental in the editing of a great deal of the work. We express our gratitude for all that they have done for the sake of Allah, for brothers and sisters and fellow Australians.

Allah has given the promise: "*Those who believe and work righteous deeds - from them shall We blot out all evil (that may be) in them, and We shall reward them according to the best of their deeds.*" Qur'an 29:7

May it please Him to accept this publication and the endeavours of all who have participated in it.

Shifa Mustapha.

Introduction

"Are you an Arab, Turk or Bosnian?" they ask.

"No" we reply.

"Oh, so what, then, is your nationality?"

"Australian" we firmly state.

"Then, what is your ethnic background?"

"Fifth generation Australian, English heritage" we tell them.

And so the conversation goes on with Muslims who express their faith. Islam, generally perceived to be alien or belonging to the east, is increasingly becoming the faith of the "West". The increasing number of conversions to Islam are rendering Islam an indigenous Australian religion, thereby dissolving the common misnomer of "every Muslim is an Arab, and every Arab a Muslim".

Tragically the events of September 2001 in America and the October 2002 Bali bombings have exacerbated the concept of the great divide between Islam and the west. However, Islam, perceived to be incompatible with the west - pending an inevitable *clash of civilisations* - can no longer be seen in such a simplistic manner, with Western Muslim revert demonstrating the compatibility and universality of Islam.

The proceeding experiences of fellow Australian Muslim revert could not have been compiled at a more significant time - a time when Islam is portrayed in the media as "oppressive" and "violent". The following accounts of Australian Muslim revert are critical in building bridges between Muslim communities and the wider society. This book is pertinent in creating Islamic awareness by conveying the experiences of Australians who chose to *live* Islam.

It is worth noting that the term *reverts* is preferred to that of *converts* because of the Islamic concept of *fitrah* - the natural inclination of all human beings to the belief of One God. The term *fitrah* is described by Yasien Mohamed (1998:3) as, "an inborn natural disposition which cannot change and which exists in all human beings". Thus, the Islamic concept of every human being born with an innate belief in One God, thus Muslim, and the resulting socialisation suppression of this belief, means that upon acceptance of Islam, people are not converting to it, they are reverting to it.

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, stated:

No babe is born but upon Fitra. It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian

or a Polytheist.

A person said: *Allaah's Messenger, what is your opinion if they were to die before that (before reaching the age of adolescence when they can distinguish between right and wrong)?*

He said: *It is Allaah alone Who knows what they would be doing.* Hadith – Muslim.

This Islamic concept of fitrah, of having an innate belief in One God, further enhances the universality of Islam, demonstrating its compatibility with all people rather than as a clashing force. It is not uncommon to find the following stories of Australian Muslim revert revealing that Islam merely confirmed what they had already believed. It is the clarity and simplicity of Islam that have been stated as key factors that have attracted so many to this faith. To become a Muslim one need only declare the testimony of faith.

Yasin Dutton (1999:153-154) describes this process:

"this two-fold acceptance is enshrined in the double declaration of faith, '*I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God*', which when said in front of witnesses, marks the formal entry of someone into the community of Muslims.

(A fuller definition of this acceptance would include the six elements of belief, namely: belief in Allah, the angels, the divinely revealed books, the prophets, the Last Day and the Decree, both the sweet of it and bitter of it)"

The declaration of faith has seven conditions:

- (1) knowledge of its meaning,
- (2) certainty which is to have complete surety of it,
- (3) exclusively worshipping Allah,
- (4) truthfulness and
- (5) love for the Shahadah and pleasure for what it necessitates and,
- (6) submissive compliance by fulfilling its rights, which are obligatory actions,
- (7) acceptance.

This is achieved by doing what is commanded and avoiding that which is prohibited (Al-Fawzaan, 1998:33).

Dutton (1999:154) states, "...it is presumed that in taking Shahadah the individual be prepared to live in accordance to what Allah and His Messenger have decreed in both the Quran - the divine revelation as conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad and the Sunnah, example of the Prophet, which together form the basis of Islam and the Shariah (Islamic Law). Although, the declaration of faith enters one into Islam,

required of the Muslim in addition to their faith, is acting in accordance with its teachings."

The families, friends and colleagues of Muslim revert may initially respond with wariness and negativity to the reversion. However, observing positive changes in the behaviour of the individual in some cases leads to not only an acceptance of the individual's decision, but an appreciation of the positive effect and changes that have consequently emerged.

The reasons for reversion vary. A number of revert have actively sought a purpose and meaning to life, and looked to religion for answers. Others were introduced to Islam through contact with Muslims, being influenced and impressed by their mannerisms, thus leading to their reversion. Significantly, the media portrayal of Islam as oppressive and violent has sparked an interest among some of the individuals to investigate Islamic teachings. Finding the contrary of what is depicted in the media has increased interest, thereby furthering investigation which has subsequently led individuals to learn about Islam and adopt it as a way of life.

Within the ensuing stories one will find described the experiences of such Australian Muslim revert, whose desire it is to share their experiences and in their own way to bridge the gap which exists between those who understand, and those who do not.

Tuba Boz.

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My Path to Islam

Sr. Jill Forrest

*"And when they listen to the revelation received by the Apostle,
thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears,
for they recognise the truth:
they pray: "Our Lord! we believe;
write us down among the witnesses."*

Glorious Qur'an 5:83

My childhood consisted of school, bible class and interaction with a group of Christian friends. It never occurred to me that my parents' chosen religion might be in error. I was extremely proud of my faith and stood up for it on a number of occasions. When I became a teenager the focus at bible class had changed, many of the teens were no longer searching for God, but seemed to seek approval from each other as a priority. They wanted to show off their talents of singing and dancing. Faith in God didn't seem to matter as much as whether or not you were talented. I kept attending, but by the time I left school I was disillusioned.

At 18 years of age I saw my first documentary on Islam. I was amazed by the fact that Muslims put so much importance on God, and placed Him first throughout all parts of their life. Of course this is how Christians supposedly are, but I seldom saw this. The fact that Muslims stopped whatever they were doing, to worship God five times a day, truly impressed me.

I started work and enjoyed the freedom of adulthood. Not feeling at home anymore at church, I slipped into a life of drinking, boys and basically living my life with little regard to the consequences. On the outside I appeared to be a happy and carefree person, but inside I was hurting. I wasn't being true to myself, I was living a lie. I realised that my life was truly empty. At 19 years of age I met my soon-to-be husband. He was also putting on a false image which truly wasn't him either, so together we left that lifestyle and started searching for our true selves. I felt there was a vacuum in my life and soon realised that without God, my life held no direction or purpose. I returned to church after my marriage, but within a couple of years I again felt no presence of God in my life. Therefore, I decided to search for God. I took out every book on religion from the library, studying them all. The faiths that preached monotheism stood out from the others. With Judaism, I could never understand their rejection of Jesus. They didn't even see him as a Prophet. I always saw them as blinded to the truth. At that time Islam really seemed to have the answers

for me, but I brushed it aside, as I thought that my doubts in Christianity were just a lack of faith.

I felt that the original church might hold the answers. I became a Catholic. Through the church I received help to learn about the history of the church and its doctrines. I was shocked to find that the bible was put together more than 300 years after Christ. I also found out that they voted on whether or not Jesus was divine. People made these decisions? People are imperfect, what if they were wrong? I was horrified! Why didn't they tell me these things in bible class at the Baptist Church? I tried to carry on with following Christianity but I had great doubts. I shoved them to the back of my mind, and told myself that I needed to have more faith.

Qur'anic I was, in time, to learn more of the truth of the early era:
"They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allah, And (they take as their Lord) Christ, the son of Mary; Yet they were commanded to worship but One God: There is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him: (far is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him)." 9:31. However, this would all come in time.

* * *

September 11th was to prove a turning point for me. I was totally shocked by these attacks, and I was further shocked to read some truly negative comments by Australians regarding Islam. From my previous study I realised they had drawn their opinions from those portrayed by the media, and that they were in error. I was determined to learn as much as possible about Islam. At this time I didn't even know any Muslims. I contacted Islam Australia's website and enquired about learning more.

Once I started to read and watch some videos; finally meeting some Muslims and asking lots of questions, I realised Islam seemed to be an answer to my problems with Christianity. I attended an Islamic class for women. The women were so friendly and kind and there was no pressure put on me. During this time there was an inner struggle taking place, but I had to confess that Islam truly did hold all the answers. Nevertheless my problem was that I was always taught that Islam had been sent by the devil to trick us into losing our salvation, maybe I was being deceived! Then I read the article, *Attributing it to the Devil*, by Gary Miller, wherein he says:

"I had experience, on one occasion, describing some of the contents in the Qur'an to a man who did not know the book I was talking about. He sat next to me with the

cover turned over. I just told him about the book, what it contained and told him it was not the bible. His conclusion was, the book was miraculous. This man was a minister in a Christian Church. He said, 'Yes, that book could not possibly have originated with man, therefore it must come from the devil, because it's not the bible.'

"The Qur'an comments on this suggestion in chapter twenty-six, verse two-hundred and eleven, as to those who would suggest that the book came from the devil. It points out that it does not quite suit him, does it? Is this how the devil misleads people? He tells them, worship none but God, he insists that they fast, that they practice charity. Is this how the devil misleads people?

"Compare the attitude of someone like this, to the attitude of the Jews who knew Jesus and opposed him until the very end. There is an episode reported in the bible where Jesus raised a man from the dead, one Lazarus, who had been dead for four days. When Lazarus came out of the tomb, alive again those Jews who were watching, what did they do? Did they suddenly say that this man is a true prophet and become believers? No, the bible says they immediately discussed among themselves that "since this man is working on his signs soon everyone will believe in him. We've got to find a way to kill him," and they attributed his miraculous powers to the devil. He raised that man by the power of the devil.

"Now, the Christians who read that episode will feel very sorry for those Jews who had clear evidence right before their very eyes and attribute the miracles to the devil. Does it not appear that they may be doing the same thing when we illustrate what we have in the Qur'an and their final excuse is only: 'It originated with the devil.'"

Qur'anicly we are told:

"No evil ones have brought down this (Revelation)" 26:210

"O ye who believe! Enter into Islam whole-heartedly; and follow not the footsteps of the evil one; for he is to you an avowed enemy." 2:228

I read it and wept. It seemed to answer my doubts, and I realised I was a believer. I had to be true to myself. I gave my Shahadah on March 7th 2002 and I feel so happy and truly at peace, Alhamdulillah (Praise be to Allah!).

My Journey to Islam

John Pugh

My journey to Islam commenced somewhere in my Catholic roots. I was born and bred in Toowoomba Queensland. Every week I attended mass with my Mother, Grandmother and Uncle. My Uncle, a committed traditional catholic, was a huge influence on my faith life and for much of my childhood I followed a strict Catholic tradition.

In 1984 my life was shattered with the death of my Uncle, and I became more involved in the church. In my last remaining two years of school I became involved in youth groups, vocation councils and parish activities. After school I worked for four years in a local clothing store and at night went to every church youth group meeting that I could attend. You could say I was a Catholic junkie. During that time I learnt a lot about the history of the Catholic Church and also learnt that the Catholic Church was full of inconsistencies. However I had a dream that I wanted to work for the Catholic Church so in 1991 I applied to go to University to study Education. I figured that with an education degree and my history, I might pick up a youth worker job. Over that time I was still involved in the church helping to form youth groups and becoming involved in the St Vincent de Paul Society.

I went to Melbourne for a month to do a youth worker course (sponsored by the local parish) and studied basic theology. I left University and picked up a teaching position in a Catholic school in Stanthorpe, it wasn't youth work but it was a start. After two years (1994, 1995) I applied for a diocesan-based position, working with intellectually disabled people. In this position I was able to attend many in-services on the Church, Jesus and God. What I began to discover was just how much the Catholic Church had lost hold of its grass roots, and had become institutionalised. I found that even two parishes in the same town disagreed with the nature of "Church" and Jesus.

While I was working in this position I met my wife, a convert to Catholicism. We were married in 1997 and in early 1998 we had our first daughter. After two and half years working with disabled people the funding ran out, and I was offered a teaching position in a local Catholic school, until the end of 1998. All dreams of working as a youth worker in the church were crushed after that and I began to suffer from depression, although I did not know it. In 1999 I worked at another local Catholic school and had another daughter, but it became evident by the end of 1999 that I could not keep on teaching. Subsequently I was offered a redundancy

package, it was then that I lost all faith in the Church. I thought it was depression, yet it was something deeper. Little did I know my wife was beginning to have her reservations about the Catholic Church too. I managed still to attend my church, but it was no longer the same. I had faith in God, but what was this Church that Jesus had begun?

My studies have revealed a church that was made by men and riddled with corruption, and often threw out those who questioned it, or were a burden, and this is where I was. Truly it is said in the Qur'an: "*Corruption doth appear on land and sea because of (the evil) which men's hands have done, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return*" 30:41.

My wife already had questions; she found that she had become part of a church, full of inconstancies. She too had a faith in God, but she had studied Islam while studying religion at U.N.E. In this she had found a religion that had faith in God, preached peace and equality for all and wasn't afraid to answer a lot of the hard questions; unlike what she had found in Catholicism. In 2001 she became a Muslim, about a month before I did. She began wearing a hijab and covering.

My turning point came about one month after my wife unofficially reverted. During that month I had become very disappointed in what my church was, and during a sermon the priest said "If all Christians treated each other with respect we would not have so many divisions." It was then the penny dropped. All Muslims treat each other with respect, men and women have equal status and there is no hierarchy. Is it not said: "*O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware*?" Glorious Qur'an 49:13.

I discovered that I have lived with a lot of Islamic ideas: I always gave what I didn't need to the poor; I always had faith and lived my life according to God's will, and I always saw people as equals. All of mankind is from Adam and Eve - "An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white - except by piety and good action. I learned that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not therefore do injustice to yourselves. Remember one day you will meet Allah and answer your deeds. So beware: do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone," was the message given in the *Farewell Sermon of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.)*.

All my life my God was leading me to Islam, I just didn't know it. My wife had already been in contact with the president of the Toowoomba Islamic Society, Dr Shahjahan Khan and on June 16th 2001 he and his wife came over to our house and witnessed our Shahadah, together. Praise be to Almighty Allah Who alone leads and gives Mercy and Light.

My Conversion to Islam

Jan Jackson

"Those that turn (to God) in repentance; that serve Him, and praise Him; that wander in devotion to the cause of God: that bow down and prostrate themselves in prayer: that enjoin good and forbid evil; and observe the limit set by God: (These do rejoice). So proclaim the glad tidings to the Believers."

Qur'an 9:112

This is the story of my conversion to Islam. Before I begin, let me say that I don't believe my story is particularly special, in that there are many stories like it. However, as I believe that God wrought a miracle in my life (as He has in many others) then of course it IS special.

I guess there are two ways to tell my story. You could say: "I met a man who introduced me to Islam. I converted, and we married." But that is a gross simplification.

You could also say it this way

I am a 48 year old Australian. I was raised a Catholic and am still grateful for the religious upbringing my parents gave me. They were practising Catholics who imparted their faith to me and I attended a Catholic school. From this education I did gain a 'version' of God and a 'kind of' spiritual sense, but these were both so vague and inaccessible as to never touch my heart. The doctrine of Christianity never really sat comfortably with me. It was like a coat that didn't fit. I wore it but it never felt right and by the time I was about 20, I was happier taking the coat off. Sadly, I didn't wear a coat at all for the next 25 years.

During that time I lived a comfortable, privileged life, in the 'western lifestyle' sense – financially secure, educated and trained, healthy, with no major crises in my life. I married. I worked. I travelled. I indulged myself. Food, wine, entertainment, weekends away, fancy hotels, overseas trips. Eat, drink and be merry. Having no children, I had no real responsibilities. I sought mainly to entertain myself, and have a good time. From where I am standing now, that period just seems like a life without purpose, and it's truly painful for me to look back and see 25 years of a Godless life. Though perhaps verse, 112 of the second Surah of the Qur'an should apply here: *Nay, but whosoever surrendereth his purpose to Allah while doing good, his reward is with his Lord; and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.* After all, what seemed to be a life without purpose was not allowed to remain without purpose!

Then, about five years ago, God gave me the opportunity to reassess my life, Alhamdulillah. My personal circumstances changed drastically. My beloved father died tragically; my marriage broke up painfully; my income was significantly reduced; and I was living alone. I was forced to take stock, reflect, and reassess my life. And I found myself in a thoroughly meaningless void.

Around this time I began to read all kinds of material on all kinds of religions. I tried to revive my Catholicism, but it was useless. It did not feel real or sincere. I felt no sense of connection. At this time I met, and had a very important conversation with, a Muslim brother, my neighbour who later became my husband. At this time I knew absolutely nothing about Islam. All my reading (on Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism, etc) seemed to have taken me down every path EXCEPT Islam. So when I asked him about HIS religion he said: "It is a beautiful religion, a simple religion, part of life." His quiet, composed, assured conviction struck me. Here was someone who was so quietly certain about his religion that it needed nothing more than these simple few words to provide an answer, an answer that seemed whole and complete. And here was someone who described his religion as "beautiful". I had never encountered this before. Religion had always been a duty, or an institution, something to be learned or endured, something burdensome and complicated and problematic – not something "beautiful". It struck my heart in a way I do not really understand. But I have to say that it was one of those defining moments of one's life – something irreversible happened!

So then it began. I decided to try and learn about Islam. I asked around, tentatively at first..... I bought books and read, I browsed websites, and I started to scan my environment for anything Islamic – not difficult living in Brunswick, Melbourne. I went to an information day at Preston mosque. I obtained a copy of the Qur'an from a book sale at the Islamic Council of Victoria. The more I read the Qur'an the more I became convinced of the truth of the Qur'anic revelations. I read books on the life of the Prophet (Peace be upon him) and became convinced that he was the last in a line of prophets before him, and a true Messenger of Allah. I tried fasting in Ramadan and saw it as a real test of whether or not I meant business. But the experience strengthened my intent. I discovered for myself the benefits, and I felt one with the brotherhood and sisterhood of all fasting Muslims around the world.

But the most powerful experience for me at this time was discovering the act of prayer. I bought a book which taught me how to pray..... and I have to say that from the moment I first bowed in prayer in the Muslim way, I felt connected to my Creator, for the first time in my life, and I wept with joy.

* * *

I've heard many new Muslims say what I'm about to say but it was so true for me. From the time I opened my mind to the possibility of becoming a Muslim, I kept encountering things that spurred me on. And it was as if they were put there especially for me. And one thing would lead to another. A newspaper article might lead to a website. A chance encounter to a bookshop. A book to another book. A website to a conversation. This information gathering was such an important time. Because when I look back it was critical what I read and who I spoke to. I did not rely on my future husband to provide information. Quite the opposite. I was determined to separate my pursuit of Islam from him. I needed to be clear about my intentions - that I wasn't pursuing Islam to please him or gain his approval. So I sought out other Muslims.

One day I went to Friday prayer at Preston mosque. I was terrified. It took every bit of effort to get myself through that door. And there I met two sisters who were like angels planted there for me, who took me under their wings. I owe a great deal to them, and to every other Muslim I have met in the few years because all of them have inspired and supported me in the warmest, and gentlest, and most generous of ways.

I said my Shahadah in Ramadan in December 1999, just before the new millennium ticked over. Around this time I was introduced to the Revert Support Group, operating in Melbourne, which has been a great help and support to me, as a source of information and a sharing of knowledge and experience, and a way of meeting other new Muslims.

Increasingly I learned the value of prayer. I learned that to worship God regularly strengthens one's commitment and sense of connection. It helps to set up an ongoing dialogue with God, a consciousness of God that starts to become more frequent, more natural - a remembering, or mindfulness of God throughout your day. Prayer acts as a reminder that you are a part of God's creation, and only a tiny part at that. You are reminded of your place in time and the universe. You cannot pray without feeling humility. It is impossible. I also learned that the frequency of prayer forces you to monitor your actions more closely, makes you more vigilant of your behaviour, and helps you to keep the concerns and preoccupations of everyday routine in perspective.

* * *

"And your God is One God: There is no god but He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful."
Surah 2:163

So why Islam over Christianity? (as my Christian friends ask)...

Throughout my Christian upbringing, despite the emphasis on Jesus Christ, I never really conceptualised him as God. I thought of him as an historical figure only, not a divine being. And I had great difficulty with the concept of the Trinity. This concept for me obscured the path to God. On the other hand the concept of Tawheed in Islam, the oneness of God, is a concept that I can fully embrace.

For me Islam is a beautiful religion because it is simple and clear, and woven into the fabric of everyday life. For me, it is not bogged down in the doctrines and dogmas of other religious traditions. I was so impressed by the fact that to actually 'become' a Muslim you need only believe it in your heart and make the declaration of faith – no instructions, no indoctrinations, no sacraments, no initiations, no tests.

Islam is full of ritual as we know – but I love the fact that the ritual is incorporated into simple acts of everyday life – in eating, washing, speaking, praying (not high 'pomp and ceremony' ritual). When I first started mixing with Muslims I loved to keep hearing the word 'Allah' on everyone's lips, and with no self-consciousness. You can go weeks, months, even years in a Christian community and never hear the word 'God' mentioned! Here's a story that illustrates that: Around the time I first started to explore Islam I went with my mother to a Catholic function. It was an informal forum with speakers and discussion, entitled "God in our society". I listened for three hours and not once was the word "God" actually spoken! except when a nun got up at the conclusion of the night to say "thank you to our speakers and thanks be to God". This was the only time I heard the word and the evening was over. As everyone clapped, I wanted to shout "Wait. Aren't you missing something here?!"

Another aspect of Islam that draws me to it is that Islam is a "bigger ask", more demanding. By that I don't just mean that it is more demanding in its discipline and its ritual, in its prayer and fasting and dietary requirements (abstinence from alcohol, etc). Rather I mean it is larger and more demanding in its focus, its vision, its scope.

Personally speaking, I find the Christian message of love one another to be something of a "given". It goes without saying that we should love one another. Whilst I would not wish to offend any Christian readers, or make a generalisation, however, in my own experience I have found the Christian way of life today (increasingly) to be simply a kind of humanitarianism which allows the person to customize or tailor-make their religion to suit themselves – love one another, don't hurt anyone, and do your own thing. It seems to concentrate on this life, narrowing its focus to this earth

and this existence.

I found this "bigger ask" in the Qur'an as well. For me the beauty of the Qur'an is the scope that it encompasses. It insists that we try and contemplate time and beyond; the universe and beyond; creation and beyond. It asks us to reflect on creation, the prophetic revelations, destiny, the beginning of life, the end of life, and the day of judgement. In so doing, we try to grasp the hugeness of everything beyond ourselves, the magnificence of God.

"(This is) a Scripture that We have revealed unto thee, full of blessing, that they may ponder its revelations, and that men of understanding may reflect." Surah 38:29

I feel so happy and so blessed to have had my life transformed. In committing to the Islamic way I have found meaning and significance in everyday life, and a consequent peace that follows from this. And I feel I have experienced the miracle of seeing myself as part of creation, and time, and God's plan, and experience the consequent joy that follows from this. I thank God. Alhamdulillah (praise be to Allah). Subhanallah (Glory be to Allah).

Abu Bakr's Way To Islam

The following is the true account of an Australian revert taken from the honours thesis of Sister Tuba Boz. His name is Abu Bakr, and while his name, like many of those of his fellow-reverts, is chosen for its meaning and its nearness to some aspect of Islam, or that of the life of the Prophet of Arabia, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), his story is truly that of an Australian young man with all his Australianism intact. And though he, himself, does not wish to be seen as other than a Muslim, it is, for fellow-Australians, encouragement and living proof of the Qur'anic ayat:

"O mankind We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, And made you into nations and tribes, That ye may know each other, Not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the Sight of Allah Is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge And is well acquainted (with all things)."

Surah 49:13

If one had told Abu Bakr earlier, that he would one day become a Muslim, his reply would most probably have been, "Naah! No way!!!" for like many Australians his perception of Muslims was that they were terrorists. However, there is no accounting for the Mercy and Graciousness of Allah who leads to His Path those whom He wills from all peoples upon the earth; and Abu Bakr was to find this in due course.

When asked what had triggered his search to find the true meaning of life, for that was the primary aim of his quest, his response was this: "There were a couple of things. It was the year my parents said they were going to separate. It was not the year they formally divorced, but it was the year my Dad moved out of the house. I went a little off the rails. I (even) had trouble with the police... I was drinking a lot." It may be seen that this was a painful time for this young man. This was to be further compounded, for it was in this year that one of his friends died. Of this event he said: "That led me to think, 'There's my mate. He just died, and he is only eighteen years old! Is he just worm food?' You know what I mean. That's when I started relating it to my life, thinking, 'If I died tomorrow what would it matter? What would it matter except to the few who know me among the billions on this Earth?' So I started thinking, 'No! There has to be more. There has to be more than just this!'"

It was with these questions in mind that Abu Bakr commenced his journey, looking to religion for the meaning of existence. He describes his experiences in this way:

"First, I mean, logically, I'm an Aussie, so I went straight to Christianity, and I thought I'd have that fish sticker on the back of my car, and "I love Jesus". I was thinking I'd go buy them and see if they did something for my parking fine!" his waggish sense of humour bubbling to the fore. Then seriously he explains, "Honestly I went through all the (Christian) religions; well not all the religions, but the ones I had access to I investigated. Christianity, including Catholicism, I investigated quite a bit. But the problem was I just couldn't find the answer. While they were all nice, I couldn't sit there and say, 'This is the religion for me!' and 'This sounds beautiful!'"

His search continued:

"I looked at Hinduism when I was working in a service station with some Hindu friends. We had conversations all the time. We didn't argue because we were pretty good friends. One would say, 'You have to believe in this god about this, and this god of that.' I would go, 'Come on man! What if they argue?' He was not to know it, but his argument was one already mentioned in the Qur'an: *"Allah hath not chosen any son, nor is there any god along with Him; else would each god have assuredly championed that which he created, and some of them would assuredly have overcome others. Glorified be Allah above all that they allege."* Surah 23:91

"Then I looked at Judaism. Again it didn't get me in the way that I thought it would!" "However, what started to get me was Buddhism. I thought, 'This is really nice you know!' But nowhere could I read or see that Buddha was actually talking about himself. Not (other than) as a person that you follow - not as a deity! And this was a religion. "So you know what I mean, it was just a nice way to be. It's not 'This is the purpose of why you are here'. And while it was nice I thought, 'This can't be it either.'

"My friend, a Christian who had earlier said to 'vow to God', said, 'Why don't you try Islam?'

I said, 'Naah man! They're terrorists! I'm not going near a mosque. No way!'

"But I found myself near a mosque, Preston Mosque. I went in and started to ask questions. And basically every question I asked, no-one would answer from their minds, everyone was pulling out a Qur'an and saying, 'Here it is.' And that really surprised me because (almost) every time I went to a priest, I did not see the Bible once. They almost never pulled out the Bible, they were just, 'Here's your answer.' This was the same with almost every religion. There were some who did read from the Bible a couple of times. But in the mosque, every single time - out came the Qur'an, and that got me. This is not about these people, it's about the Book, and

that's when I started reading the Qur'an. It took months and months though, six to seven months. I had a lot of questions!"

At the end of these months how did this young man, now twenty years of age, decided to become Muslim?

The crucial moment of his conversion came one night, as he explained: "One night I had just been speaking to a couple of Australian brothers at the mosque. They told me to take the Qur'an home and read it. I had already taken one, but they gave me this one with big letters - the other one I had was little and was harder to read. That night I sat in bed and lit a candle. I had the window open. It was a nice summer's night. It had this atmosphere, this religious atmosphere. I was set, and I was sitting there thinking, 'This is beautiful and very sacred!'

"Everything was really good and I started reading Qur'an and thinking, 'This is very beautiful, it says exactly what I think it should say.' It feels like it's right you know, but I'm not quite there, you know! I just need a bit of a hand. And I sat back, Qur'an in hand, and said, 'O God, give me a sign! But it has to be pretty good - like lightning,' - and it was a clear summer's night. 'If you do lightning, I'm yours - I'm your servant. And maybe if you can't do lightning - something like a crack or something; or a flash of light; or the candle! I would be pretty impressed if the candle just blew up to about two feet high, you know, like in the movies!'

"And I'm sitting there waiting!

"Nothing at all happened! Like I couldn't even say a creak in the wall was my sign! So I'm sitting there pretty disappointed, and I'm angry . . Right? And I'm like, 'God, I'm asking you. You're supposed to be All-Powerful! Alright - I'm going to give you a second chance.' Like that was a fair bit to ask - summer, lightning! 'Okay, maybe like, a car can just backfire that goes past - that's something that happens all the time, but at least I'll know it's for me.' So I lowered my levels . . Right?

"Subhan'Allah!" (Exalted is Allah) he exclaims, shaking his head at the very thought of it. "And I'm sitting there thinking, 'Alright!' So I look around again - Nothing! All is so silent . . I could have been in space. Not even an ant made a noise, and by this time I was shattered, because this was the moment! I had thought, 'This is it!' you know, 'This is my time!' . . And nothing happened!"

"So I'm sitting there, pretty disappointed, and I thought, 'I may as well keep on reading Qur'an'. So I looked down and turned the page, and the very next ayat (verse) was something to the effect: For those of you who ask for signs, have I not

shown you enough already? Look around at the sky, the trees, the water, these are your signs. These are the Signs for those who know!"

"Lo! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of night and day, and the ships which run upon the sea with that which is of use to men, and the water which Allah sendeth down from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after its death, and dispersing all kinds of beasts therein, and (in) the ordinance of the winds, and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth: are signs (of Allah's Sovereignty) for people who have sense. " Surah 2:162

"I was sitting down; I freaked out! I closed the Qur'an and chuck the quilt over my head. I was freaking out because here it was! You know what I mean?"

"So the next morning I went straight to the mosque and told them I wanted to become Muslim, because I had had my sign. I had it, even thought it was not my sign. I shouldn't be arrogant and think I have a sign.

Isn't the water my sign and all these things around me are signs, you know, that there is a Creator!"

With this in mind, one cannot help but wonder whether this young man had put aside all his previous fears of terrorism and danger which he and countless peoples perceive to be part of Islam and Muslims?

But let us continue:

"That evening at the mosque there were all these Muslims there - heaps of people! And I'm thinking, 'Look at this religion. So many people! They're all so strong!' Then I realised that it was the first night of Ramadan, the fasting month. They were all there to do their last prayer (for the day) you know. But I really did think this was amazing. So you see, my first real experience there was this. Quite honestly there must have been a thousand people at Preston Mosque that night, maybe more!

"While I was waiting to give the Shahadah (the declaration of faith) there at tarawih (the night prayer during Ramadan), I'm sitting there thinking, 'If I get these words wrong I'm a dead man! They're going to kill me!'

"So now I'm standing up there, in front of all these people, and Sheikh Fehmi says to me, 'These are the words that you say,' and so I started saying them. And I've got to admit that I was nervous before - but as soon as I started speaking the words, I felt like it was just me standing there by myself; like, that there was no-one else, and I felt, honestly, the only way I can describe this feeling is as if there is a shower on

the inside of my head - a cold shower, going straight through my body. I'm standing there, hair standing on end . . . then all the brothers came and hugged me!"

One can only imagine the warmth and fellowship that this young brother experienced; such that fear of terrorism and its accompanying horrors melted away in the light of knowledge and the empathy of brotherhood which is peculiar to Islam alone. Is it not said: "*He it is that hath strengthened thee (Muhammad) with His aid and with (the company of) the Believers. And (moreover) He hath put affection between their hearts: Not if thou hadst spent all that is in the earth, couldst thou have produced that affection, but Allah hath done it: for He is Exalted in might, Wise.*" (Qur'an 8:62,63).

However, this was not all he learned, his education was just beginning: "But you know, I didn't even know how to pray! I had to fast - and I was still eating ham! I didn't even know that you shouldn't eat it - so I'm fasting and then eating, like, a whopper burger with ham. I didn't know it was haram (forbidden) but I did know that you're not supposed to eat from before sunrise until after sunset. You know, I was fasting, but it was pretty hard!"

So did Abu Bakr, his chosen Islamic name, finally reach his goal?

"I (now) know why I am here; what I am here to do; and what it is all about."

When asked if becoming Muslim had changed his personality and his life his reply was:

"I feel like I am here for a different purpose, but I don't think that if you met me when I was fifteen years old and then you met me now that you'd say, 'Man! You have changed so much! You're not the same person I knew before.' I think I have carried through most of the person I always was. I just don't do some things I used to do. And I don't think in some ways about things that I used to think about. I think I've always been positive, but Islam has given me that (extra) - like if the guy outside put his bobcat through the house, I'd just go: 'Subhan'Allah! I'll have to fix that.' It's not like I'm going to go, 'Oh why do you always do this to me?' You know, it's just a thing that is not so important. Probably my priorities are completely different. Like, before, it was all (about) me!"

Abu Bakr's family received news of his reversion very positively:

My family was happy for me but concerned as to how this would change our relationship." Of course friendships did not all stand the test: "I lost a few friends (so-called) as I no longer wanted to drink, go out, etc."

Of reversion generally he stated: "I use the word revert because, I mean, everyone uses convert because that is just a Western ideal. You know (in the Western context) that you have converted to something. But when you look into Islam I guess you realise that the term Muslim just means it comes from Islam, Right? It is a statement of what you are. So Islam means to submit your will to God; to do what God asks you to do; whereas a Muslim is someone who is doing it. So if you are not doing what God has asked you, you are not a Muslim. So, in effect, Muslim is not a noun, it's a doing word (a verb). Therefore, my tree in the backyard is doing what God asked it. The tree is Muslim to me, you know! It's submitting its will to God. Everything has energy. So when you're born, you're Muslim, you know! 'I'm hungry' - you cry - that's Islamic you know," he says laughing. "You are acting in accordance with your nature, and it's only when you get a little bit older, and people teach you stuff, that you go away from Islam because you take on someone else's ideals. Then when you want to come back, you revert, because you were already Muslim when you were born."

So it was that in 1996 in Preston Victoria a young Australian man found that for which he was searching. His life has been quite eventful and it is noted that Abu Bakr is now a Psychologist and a Film maker. May it please Almighty Allah to continue to bless this young man.

How I came to Islam

Aisha Eliza Saleem

"Whoso obeyeth Allah and the messenger, they are with those unto whom Allah hath shown favour, of the prophets and the saints and the martyrs and the righteous. The best of company are they!"

Qur'an 4:69

I was Born in Australia of Polish Background. I was brought up as a Roman Catholic and used to attend church almost every Sunday. I have always been a believer and remember strongly believing and engaging in prayers as young as five years of age. By the time I was ten, I didn't fit in at school. My mind was always somewhere else, searching and pondering. I used to think, "I don't need these people as my friends anyway because I have God and Jesus."

Teachers would always say, on my school reports, that I was withdrawn. My games often consisted of my playing "priest" and giving religious sermons to my toys. By the time I was thirteen, I was planning for the coming of the Anti-Christ and came up with all these plans on how not to follow him, when he'd be pretending to be God. At this point, after a lot of reflection, I also decided to no longer pray to Jesus and pray solely to God.

During my teenage years, I used to spend hours wondering about, and searching, for truth and knowledge. I even wrote some letters to Christian organisations asking them for their interpretation of the meaning of life. "Surely it can't just be studying, working, and that's it?" I thought, but received no satisfactory replies. I didn't understand why I could in one way be so interested in God and religion, but on the other hand didn't connect with the Bible or the masses held at church. Because of this I continued in major confusion but still, even on my lowest days, would manage to thank God for that day and ask for help. In fact I used to frequently ask God to show me the truth and the purpose of life.

At around 19 years of age, I got to the point where I was completely fed up. I was now open to exploring totally different religions. I attended a private college where there were some overseas students of different faith, including Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. That was my first encounter with Islam, but unfortunately I couldn't find anyone to explain it to me. I came to know Muslims, but didn't know what Islam was!

I went to university and in the second year of my degree course I found out what Islam really was all about, through a Muslim who didn't drink alcohol or go night clubbing (unlike the other Muslims I had met at the private college). He had an amazing character, and this everyone noticed. So I asked him about the Muslims at my previous college. His reply was that according to Islamic teachings Muslims are not allowed to drink and go to night clubs. "Your friends were not practising Islam, and not practising the teachings of Prophet Mohammad (SAW)" he told me. I asked him to tell me more about this Prophet of whom he spoke. So he taught me about Prophet Mohammad (SAW) and his teachings. I wanted to know more about Islam but we had to finish our assignment.

I couldn't focus on my studies. In my mind I kept thinking, "Who is Mohammad? Why hadn't I learned about him at school? Who are Muslims? Why do some Muslims practise Islam, and why some Muslims do not?and so on."

The more I learnt about Islamic teachings, the more I gradually changed. My fear of God increased as I was becoming more aware of reality. I made sure that there was nothing like alcohol in my life, my manner of dressing changed to a more conservative look, etc. Each night I prayed to God, to show me the true religion; each time I would be shown Islam. Surely, "*The Truth is from thy Lord; so be not at all in doubt.*" Qur'an 2:147.

One night, sometime in 1999 I told God I needed to escape the worldly problems of my life. I needed to focus on Him alone. This was the night I reverted to Islam, right then! That immense fear of God in the context that I must not disobey Him; that I must start doing good deeds for His sake, and that the Day of Judgement is very real, was the catalyst which prompted my decision. It was a powerful, amazing night for me, and I felt extremely light, almost as if I were floating. I received a lot of guidance from the person whom I later married.

To this day my family is not willing to accept me as a Muslim, even though Islam has brought the best out in me by showing me how to respect my family, and especially my parents, as it says in the Qur'an:

"Thy Lord hath decreed, that ye worship none save Him, and (that ye show) kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them to attain old age with thee, say not "Fie" unto them nor repulse them, but speak unto them a gracious word. And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy, and say: My Lord! Have mercy on them both as they did care for me when I was little. Your Lord is best aware of what is in your minds. If ye are righteous, then lo! He is ever forgiving unto those who

turn (unto Him). "Chapter 17 Verse 23-25

My goal is to always strive in the Path of Allah Ta'ala; Inshallah to some day become an Aalimeh,(an Islamic scholar) so I can help others for the sake of Allah. My thirst for knowledge of Islam continues to increase, (Alhamdulillah),and one thing I have noticed during the time since I became Muslim - I have never been bored - I can't think of even a single time when I have had nothing to do!

Why I Chose Islam

As Presented at Curtin University, Perth, WA on 12th April 2003

Abdullah Islam

And behold! God will say:

"O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God?" He will say: "Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, Thou wouldest indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart, Though I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knowest in full all that is hidden.

Qur'an 5:116

To explain to you why I chose Islam, I have to go back before my knowledge and acceptance of Islam to when I was born into a Catholic/Protestant family. My Father was Catholic my Mother was Protestant, but as my Father ruled the house it was a Catholic family. Now, I rejected the Catholic belief at a young age and then from this time I basically rebelled against this strict lifestyle in which I was brought up. From there I ended up on the streets, doing drugs, all messed up, drinking alcohol - totally shot.

I was dragged out of the gutter by a man who trained me to be a weight lifter, gave me back pride in myself and told me that while I was training my body, I had to seek a spiritual path as well, because physically it's not enough there must also be a spiritual part to one's life. So from there I went on a journey searching all the different faiths and I ended up being a born-again Protestant Pentecostal Christian, preaching Jesus to everyone and anyone who would listen and to those who wouldn't listen. Basically I became a Bible basher.

From there I travelled overseas, preaching Jesus, and telling people how Jesus could change their lives; save their souls, and the whole thing. I used to debate scripture with people. One brother, a Christian brother, who I led to Jesus came up against me in a debate at work. He was going on about the Trinity and he pointed out to me a simple thing that the Trinity didn't come about until 325 years after the death of Christ. Ok that's 325 years after the death of Jesus and the resurrection to some people! It was a political move by emperor Constantine at the first council of Nicea (325 AD) to unite the Romans and the Christians together to give him a power base. He basically decreed that Jesus was God and the Roman Sun God, because Greek

and Roman mythology had taken over Christianity; Christianity did not take over Greek and Roman mythology. The Roman Sun God's birthday, which was the 25th December became Jesus' birthday. The Roman's Sunday became the holy Sabbath. Also the counsel decreed that Jesus was the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, the very God of the very God. It also declared the Trinitarian concept, the official doctrine of the Pauline Church, which is now, basically, the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, you must understand that whether it be the Roman Catholic Church, or the Protestant church, all the scriptures came from the one source - that which became the Catholic Church. So all the canonical Gospels were in the hands of the Catholics originally. Through them came the Gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, the only four Gospels. After that they went about destroying all the Hebrew Scriptures, over three hundred of them written in the original Hebrew text and many of them were eyewitnesses' accounts. So from there in 380 emperor Constantinople of Rome made the Trinitarian base of belief, the Catholic faith obligatory to all his subjects, and it's been that way since. That's why Rome is the head of the faith. In 381 the counsel of Constantinople attended by 186 Bishops they completed the three present head of the Trinity, and they added to the Godhead the person of the Holy Spirit. In 381 Emperor Theodosius threatened to punish all that did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. That's why we have the basic Trinitarian doctrine of all Christian faiths today, except for a few who believe that Jesus was not God, Jesus was a Prophet of God, a messenger of God, similar to Islam.

Now the implications of the Trinitarian doctrine are truly obvious, they have nothing to do with the original teachings of Jesus, so for me that was a major, major turning point in my Christian faith, because if Jesus didn't become God until 325 years after his death, what can I say? Simple! You know this is a man made thing!

However, while I was preaching Christianity - and I was going to preach Christianity to the Muslims - that was my intention - I started learning about Islam. You go to any Christian bookshop and you will find a whole shelf on Islam. You go to any Islamic bookshop or centre you won't find anything about Christianity. Well the Christians are too busy worrying about the Muslims, and the Muslims are too busy getting on with their business. They're not worried about Christians, honestly the Christians think that the Muslims want to take over the world and that they want to invade this country, and that they want to do all these crazy things: they think that they're storing guns underneath their Mosques! I assure you, I've been to every Mosque in Perth and there are no guns! They are not terrorists! I don't know a single terrorist - I have never met one. Further, I don't know any one with those views.

So as I went on studying about Islam, yet still a Christian, I could see the similarities

between Islam and the Bible. Many of the teachings in the Bible were not necessarily the words that were originally said - but the actions. Like Moses, being told to take off his shoes when he entered Holy ground, now never once did I take off my shoes when going into a Church. No one did. Yet you go to a Mosque and everyone takes off their shoes, for it is Holy ground. Moses went down on his knees and prostrated before God. Now Brothers and Sisters of Islam forgive me if I do not say Allah, but I'm talking to the Christians, and I'll just use the word God because Christians have a tendency to believe that they have their God, and that Allah is a totally separate God. Of course we know He is not - He is God. Allah means, The One True God - being the Creator of the heavens and the earth; the Creator of all things; the Creator of you and of me. Anyway, Moses prostrated before God; Daniel prostrated before God; Abraham prostrated before God, Jesus (peace be upon Him) also fell on his face and prostrated before God.

You go to any Mosque, they are all kneeling and prostrating before God, Brothers and Sisters. I go to a Church, we're all dancing around in front of a band, like a rock and roll concert, waving our hands about in the air! This is not worship. This is rock and roll. Job and all the prophets accepted the will of God, hard or easy; good or bad. Read your scriptures, understand them, look at them.

The Qur'an says (2:43) "*And be steadfast in prayer; practise regular charity; and bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship).*" My advice to you is to pray morning, noon and night. The only time we prayed was going to Church on Sunday. You walk around talking. If you're talking to God, you should have a true fear of God; an understanding of He, who is the Creator. Get down upon your knees, have your face on the ground.

To me these were all the things that I could see which were not happening in the Church, but which were happening in the Mosques; happening in Islam. In I Thessalonians 5:17 it says, "Pray without ceasing". Now, I prayed in tongues, a gift from the Holy Spirit. This is babble, nothing more than babble! In Islam there is a prayer when you walk in through the door; a prayer when you walk out through the door; there is a prayer when you walk into the toilet; a prayer when you walk out; a prayer when you hop in your car; a prayer when you hop out; a prayer for everything. In Islam you pray without ceasing. Every action in your life is dedicated to Allah (God). The reverence and the respect of God is not a circus act, hyped up by music and rock and roll bands playing; and being told that the presence of God was in the place because we were all hyped up on this great music. An anointing of God simply meant that the band was playing well, because when the band wasn't playing, the anointing wasn't going too well!

* * *

Now last time I spoke, I asked, "What was Ishmael's crime?" I didn't get to go into detail then, so now I'll go into detail. What was Ishmael's crime? As a Christian I was told it didn't matter if my Mother was a prostitute, a drug addict; if my father was a derelict or what ever, I accept that God accepts me. I bow down to God, I believe in God that if I totally accept him he will accept me, that it doesn't matter where I've been or what I've done. Yet in the Old Testament Ishmael was rejected because he was the son of a slave woman, according to the Old Testament.

As the son of a slave woman, the promises of God were not attributed to him, simply because he was the son of a slave woman! What a contradiction in teachings! So what was his crime? None, he was born to a slave woman, yet he still loved God, revered God, worshipped God.

I found the Qur'an to be the most beautiful thing I'd ever heard in the world. I didn't understand it at first, but it was beautiful. Then when I actually read the English text... I can't put it into words. It has no contradictions, yet the Bible is full of contradictions. Now I'm not beating up on Christianity here, I'm just telling the things that changed my life, and the direction in which I was heading.

Islam is a solution to racism. A little story for you folks, Jesus was not White, blonde-haired and blue eyed. He was not necessarily black; but he wasn't white. He was somewhere in between.

And what of equality of the sexes? I love the fact that Islam 1400 years ago made women equal to men. It's only 50-60 years that women in Western countries actually received equal rights, and yet in Islam they always have had equal rights.

Islam preaches tolerance of Christians and Jews. Now, as a Christian I was told to love, but yet in our actions - and that was how we were - the only time we entertained a Muslim, a Jew, a Buddhist, a Hindu was when we were trying to convert them. Now, a Muslim will not Bible bash you or should I say Qur'an bash you, this statement does not exist in Islam, Qur'an bashing, because they don't. If you wish to talk about it, they will talk about it, if you ask questions; they will answer you about it. We as Muslims believe that you will come into the realization yourself, by the guidance of Allah (God).

Ephesians 6:12 says "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." All who are not Born again Christians are deceived by the devil and possessed by evil spirits, this is what I was taught. In Islam we believe that not all Muslims are going to go to heaven, also that

not all Christians and not all Jews will go to heaven; some Muslims, some Christians and some Jews will go to heaven: "*Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians and the Christians, - any who believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness, - on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*" Qur'an 5:69

Those who have a love for God and follow his ways and are righteous! But as a Born again Christian all I had to do was accept Jesus, and all my sins were washed away, and I was going to heaven - free ticket! Didn't matter what I did wrong as long as I pleaded the blood of Jesus over myself, prayed, was repentant I was still going to heaven, and everybody else wasn't going there. Now who am I to make that choice? What is this doctrine that it says this choice is to be made? The only choice is by God. He decides who goes to heaven and who doesn't go to heaven. . . no one else! And only God can forgive your sins . . . not a man that became God 325 years after he walked the Earth. God in all of His infinite wisdom and power and glory can forgive your sins, just like that! You don't need to accept anything; you just need to be repentant. In the Qur'an it says:

"Who could be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to God, does good and follows the way of Abraham, the true in faith for God did take Abraham for a friend" [4:125] It explains itself right there.

What has happened to me since I have become a Muslim? I've come out of the darkness and into the light; I'm a slave only to Allah. I have complete internal peace beyond all description, that I never found as a Christian.

Now it doesn't matter if I am going through hassles in my job; doesn't matter if I am going through hassles everywhere else. It doesn't matter if I am being discriminated against, because I am a Muslim, which has happened in this free democratic society in which we live, for I never experienced these things until I became a Muslim. Let me tell you something about discrimination people, you have no idea about discrimination unless you are being discriminated against. You can say "oh no he's not being discriminated against" or, "she's not being discriminated against," because you're from the outside looking in. But when you are being discriminated against, when you are being harassed, you know it - not necessarily everybody else.

Why did I choose Islam? Because I simply cannot deny the truth. Islam is the truth and the truth has set me free. *Ash-hadu an laa ilaha illa allah wa ash-hadu anna Muhammadan abduhu wa rasuulallah* (I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah).

My Journey to Islam in the United States

Sr. Shakina

I was born and raised in West Virginia in the United States of America. Although I was raised in a Christian family, my father was Jewish. He and my mother divorced when I was only one year old. My mother, a scientist of sorts, believed in God. Looking back I have to say that I came from a family that knew the fear of God, and this was reflected in their daily practice to the best of their ability. We were Baptists. In the area in which I grew up, one didn't know what a Muslim was, let alone see a woman walking down the street wearing hijab!!

I started playing the flute when I was only five and became a professional flute player by the age of twelve. It is important for me to mention this aspect as the flute did play a big part in my reverting to Islam. I also played many other instruments, such as oboe, saxophone etc. And gosh, I even made good money doing something I loved! I went into the Defence Forces when I was eighteen, and was in the Navy, later coming out disillusioned, disabled and mad at the world. Again I turned to music, playing the oboe and flute in a Symphony Orchestra. My life went on - I got married, a few times, and divorced a few times, due to abuse. Deep down I was looking for something, but didn't know what it was.

A few years ago I attended a Fundamental, Independent, Baptist church. This is the strictest type of Baptist you could be - no short skirts just high morals. I had many times asked our Pastor a lot of questions concerning God. I asked some questions and told him that I wanted to study other religions. He replied that it would not be a good idea; that Satan would use it to draw me away from the Church, and that by studying other religions it would show a lack of faith. Notice how he said *Church* and not *God*? By the way, he never could answer the questions to my satisfaction, and he had a PhD in Theology.

I was part of the Music Ministry at the Church, but one day while walking through the back of the church building to the music room, I found two people gossiping about me. They said that since I was divorced I should not be up front playing music, even though the people loved to hear me play, and I was very good. It is funny that the one lady who said this had just been divorced and remarried within a month! Now I note how it was related that Abu Huraira reported that the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, said: "*Those who believe in God and the last Day should not harm their neighbour, and those who believe in God and the Last Day should be generous to their guests and those who believe in God and the Last*

Day should speak of what is good or remain silent." (Hadith - Bukhari) Quite obviously this was not the case with the Christians who I overheard.

This was a turning point in my life. I may have been divorced, but I had very high standards. I didn't remarry from the time of my last divorce due to religious reasons at that time. I didn't date or drink, or smoke or do anything bad. I lived a good clean life. I worked hard and supported myself and my teen-age daughter - I had divorced her dad when she was two years old. I received nothing from him, and I haven't remarried since.

I quit playing the flute and also quit going to Church, just studied and studied. Although I have to admit I miss playing the flute, since it was a big part of my life growing up, but I now love ALLAH the MOST. During this time I studied many other religions.

I eventually met a person who had moved to our town, who was actually Muslim, but at that time I just read a few pamphlets she gave me and didn't revert. I thank ALLAH now for this woman. I may not have reverted due to her, but she did open up a door for me, to view inside. So may ALLAH reward her greatly.

At that time my daughter was in college and she also met some friends and visited Rochester Minnesota. She loved it there and liked the college her friends went to, so we moved to that area. She moved ahead of me, because I was in the middle of classes at my own college. And yes, I went back when I had her almost raised and she didn't need me quite as much. She had met some Muslim people from Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates and she started studying Islam. I, too, had been by this time, looking more and more into Islam. It was one of the religions I was studying, and for some reason I kept returning to the study of it. I found it to be the truest religion. I had not told my daughter that I was studying Islam over those past years, I kept this to myself; at that time I was truly a Muslim, but didn't confess it.

One day my daughter came to me and asked me if she could revert to Islam. She had a very scared look on her face and she knew that I was a strong Baptist Woman. I just said "Oh?" I asked "Why?" She told me that the lady she had been talking to told her to ask my permission because of what the Qur'an says about the Mother. I questioned her to make sure she knew what she was talking about. She just sat there with this very scared look on her face, as if she was afraid of what I might say. And sure enough she understood Islam very thoroughly. I then confessed to her that I had also been studying Islam. This came as a surprise to her. So a few weeks later, after she had introduced me to her new friends, and her new older Muslim friends, we gave our Shahadah together, in front of a group of 12 ladies, at a friends house.

Isn't ALLAH GREAT! She is now married to a man and I have a grandson on the way. Wow! Maybe even this week. Inshallah.

The reason the flute was so important is that it was my life, until I met ALLAH, through Islam. Being Muslim has not been easy. I reverted two years ago in July. I was living in an area where it seemed that the women did not like me, due to my very white, pale skin. They also didn't like how I dressed, when I went to the Mosque to pray. They thought that I should dress like them and act like them. I wore a blue jean skirt, hijab and long sleeves. The Imam told me not to worry, that I looked ok; that it was what was in the heart that counted. The thought was that these people were putting too much culture in to their practice of Islam. I was American, and proud of the way that Allah made me. These times however were not easy times for me. The one good thing I had going for me, at that time, was that I had a few good friends – mostly from Pakistan, Egypt, Syria and some other places - together to with an Imam from Egypt, who took the time to teach my daughter and myself every week. May Allah reward these friends, and the Imam, for their patience with me.

On 14th September 2001, I had a bad thing happen to me. I had been Muslim for only two months at this time. I was attacked in a public place, in a grocery store actually. I just happened to be in an isle where there was a security camera when this young man jammed his buggy into me so hard that it cut my lower back, as well as my ankles and one of my legs. He pushed me into the can isle, and caused one shelf to fall down on top of me. I received cuts on my head and hands from these cans. ALLAHU AKBAR. The security camera was right on that isle and they caught him. He was amazed that I spoke such good English. Well I am American! He said he thought that I was an Arab, as if being an Arab after 9/11 was a good reason to hurt someone! How stupid! But something good came even out of this!

During the course of events I was given the opportunity to do justly to this man. Herein the Glorious Qur'an gave me advice with Surah 5:8 being my Guide: *O ye who believe! stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that ye do.*

I was empowered to give him the choice of going to jail, I did have the security camera as a witness; or the choice of listening to a lecture of Islam, in ten one hourly sessions. Al Humdulillah he chose the lectures. And I will not say he reverted, but he did have a better respect of the Muslims in that community, and he even ended up studying Islam longer than I made him sign the contract for. He was only 20 years old and had not been raised well. Oh well, enough of that. ALLAH AKBAR!

In the area where I lived, unfortunately they didn't like Muslims. I had flattened tyres some mornings and things of this nature. I even got notes under my door saying "Muslim go home" - I was home. Amazing!

Again I take refuge in the Qur'an, and in particular Surah 7:42: *But those who believe and work righteousness,- no burden do We place on any soul, but that which it can bear,- they will be Companions of the Garden, therein to dwell (for ever).* None of these things have turned me away from Islam.

I have recently moved to the Virginia area where there are a lot more Muslims and I feel better and safer wearing Hijab. However, while I will not say that I am a good Muslim, I can honestly say that I study and read, and do grow, very slowly everyday. I have a lot to learn, and I find even trying to pray in Arabic very hard. But soon, Insha-Allah, I will find a place to take lessons.

I have not remarried, but I do feel that religiously, some day this will be a possibility, after all in a sense my life began when I reverted. May ALLAH reward those of you who help we who are revert. Reversion is not an easy step to take. Sometimes we lose family, friends and even our jobs. But the rewards in the end are worth it. My treasures are not here on this earth. . . . Simply me!

From Marxism to Islam

As presented at the Alexander Lecture Theatre, University of Western Australia on 12th July 2003

Yusef Griffin

It was related that Anas said that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

"None of you will have attained faith until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself." Hadith - Bukhari

Briefly, I will introduce myself; my former name is Joseph Philip Rene Griffin. Most of my non-Muslim friends know me as Philip Griffin. I was born in Geneva, Switzerland of a Swiss-French mother and an English father. I have a brother 11 months younger than me, a sister 8 years younger than me, and recently my father and his new wife have had a baby girl, my sister who is 39 years younger than I.

I was baptized as a Swiss French Protestant, and grew up from the ages of 3 -17 years in New Zealand. My family is wealthy and I was fortunate to grow up in an environment where I did not want for anything materially. My parents were happy together and I felt loved by both of them. My father's side of the family worshipped money, and its power, and their use of it. (The manipulation of it caused me to view money very suspiciously.) His family did not attend Church and that practice was in place going back a long way to before my inventor great-great grandfather. These people heralded from Rhode Island in the USA, which was well known for allowing worship and freedom from persecution of any religious or non religious practice.

The first and only organized religious instruction I received in my life was through my Mum, who encouraged me to get some religious education at a Sunday School in the country town we lived in, near the Bay of Islands, New Zealand. However, I had a major issue with the Christian doctrine being taught to me, namely that Jesus was the Son of God, and that Mankind could kill God, or part thereof, on the Cross. These ideas seemed completely absurd to me at the age of around 6 years old.

Thus the Sunday School classes lasted no more than six lessons. At school I was frequently reminded by other children, that is when I could understand them, as I spoke French as my first language, that I would end up in the Hell Fire as a sinner for not going to Church. I thought at the time that this outcome seemed far fetched, as my major issue with them was how could man kill God. To this day that theory seems structurally flawed to me.

Qur'anic ally it is said: "*O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His apostles. Say not "Trinity": desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs.*" 4:171

And further: "...they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God";- but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not"

Qur'an 4:157.

Later in my childhood I became aware of the cold war conflict, which encouraged me to ascertain which political system made more sense. I weighed up the Marxist Communist system against the liberal Capitalist system, and decided at around 12 years of age that the Soviet System was best able to promote the greatest good for the greatest amount of people; this incidentally is also an English liberal Utilitarian view point.

I spent four years at High School learning Russian, presuming that the Soviets would win. My father and I would often disagree on social justice issues, me coming from the left-wing and him having the liberal laissez-faire viewpoint.

During my seventeenth year my family moved from Auckland to Perth, Western Australia. I started studying my first degree, a Bachelor of Business, at Curtin University. Simultaneously I studied night classes at Midland Technical College to complete my Commercial Pilots' Licence.

At University I became very good friends with a Palestinian Christian, who explained in depth the true situation in Palestine. His grandparents being gunned down in cold blood, by the Zionist invaders, in their own house in which the family had lived for many generations. I campaigned with my friend against the Zionist oppression during my last year at University, which brought me into conflict with the Pro Zionist Jewish students who could not understand my position.

They would say to me, you are like us: privileged, drive a nice car, have money etc, why are you supporting this view point. They also explained that God had stated in the Torah that the Tribe of Israel was entitled to that land. I said that I had no issue with them, just that it was unfair to kill for the land, when they could have tried to

buy the people out, after all the Jews were mainly wealthy in my view. I explained that the situation was akin to the British invasion of Aboriginal Australia, in which there was no just compensation for the land grab from the native inhabitants.

I married my ex-wife after University and worked a seven-and-a-half year successful career at a Multi-National company spending almost three years on the road visiting and working in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, England, France and Italy. My wife bore me two beautiful children, my daughter who is almost 17 and my son who is almost 15. My son, All praise is due to Allah, reverted to Islam four months after I did.

After my marriage broke down irreconcilably, and being subjected to onerous property settlement and maintenance conditions, I decided to retire from work and spend time rebuilding my shattered manhood, and to spend time with my young children. They were 4 years and 2 years at the time of the divorce. I spent a considerable amount of time with my then-young children, taking them to their first days of school and other important social events in their lives.

After the separation I decided to enjoy life instead of chasing the worldly life of money and career, that had become part of my then-lifestyle. I spent the next twelve years doing what I wanted, and became a regular in the Rave scene with all the sinful consequences. I did not behave myself and abused myself on drugs, alcohol and women. All praise is due to God, that Allah has forgiven me all the sins that I committed during that time. I was depressed at not being able to live with my children, as a regular father, and this concerned me a lot. The partying scene, of which I remained part, seemed after a while to be the same old thing. Despite enjoying myself in dance parties in San Francisco, London, New York, Thailand, the scene for me in the end seemed monotonous and the people involved were getting younger and younger and abusing themselves more and more. In that time I had three long term de-facto relationships and other shorter relationships.

A turning point came in the mid-90's when my family ended up ripping each other to pieces in the public forum of the courts. I sided with justice and supported those who had been attacked viciously for their worth in money. I thought long and hard about life and re-affirmed my beliefs at that time which were, that there was a creator of the universe, a judgment day and process, that Jesus and Moses (peace upon them) were prophets of the Creator and came with the law. I had brought up my children on the Golden Rule of "do unto others what you want others to do to you".

I had read the *Bhagvad Gita*, a Hindu book; the Buddhist Tibetan book of living and dying, and the Tibetan book of the dead. I had studied Christianity and Judaism.

Members of my family are astrologers. I had looked at all other major faiths in the world except Islam, as I recall as a child being told that Muslims liked to kill Christians. I had not taken up any faith in depth because none seemed to me to be clearly the truth.

My first experience with Islam occurred in Northern India in the 1993 when I was in Jaipur with my de facto partner. It was a Muslim festive occasion and my partner insisted on going into the streets with all the men, despite the fact that all the women were located on the first floor balconies. We were surrounded and harassed by Muslim brothers and had to flee for our lives to an armed Indian Soldier on guard duty. After that occasion I thought that Islam was unfriendly, and had a prejudice against me, whereas today I realize the aggressive behaviour I was subjected to was not directed at me, but was actually directed at my partner, who was in reality inappropriately dressed at the time, although at that time I considered her adequately covered. I never looked further into Islam at that stage, and retained my prejudiced views.

The major shift in my thinking came on 9/11. I was half-way through my law degree, which confirmed that there is no justice in the western liberal capitalist system. It really is a tool of the rich elite for exploiting and suppressing the masses. Having subsequently completed my law degree, I have not changed my view. After 9/11, I started looking on the internet for any information about these so-called terrorists, i.e. the Muslims. In fact just before the 9/11 attack, the UN conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa had witnessed the arbitrary departure from the meeting of both the USA and Israel. This action struck me as a major change in global relations.

After 9/11, I was busy with my study so I could not spend too much time on my research into Islam. In any event what information I gained pointed to the Muslims as being misrepresented in the Western Media, and that I needed to dig a little deeper.

I felt that if the Muslims were practising their religion, and this was confirmed to me by my view that the Masjids were being used regularly, that they were actually promoting the True religion of God, that is following the last book in the series as revealed to the last Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him.

Another turning point was my son's decision to come and live with me. I decided that I had to lead by example and to give up permanently my hedonist and Pagan lifestyle. By pagan I mean, I was not a practicing Jew, Christian or Muslim and that I was a person who set a high value on sensual pleasures. So, I cleaned up my act and started to behave like an adult.

It has been related that Ibn Mas'ud said that a man said "O Messenger of God! Will we be punished for what we used to do in the days of ignorance?" The Prophet (Prayers & peace be upon him) said:

"Whoever does good in Islam will not be punished for what he used to do in the days of ignorance, and whoever does evil in Islam will be punished for his previous and subsequent sins." Hadith - Bukhari

* * *

The University break enabled me to do only a little bit of my research into Islam. The major problem was with my ex-wife, who when realizing the loss of monetary benefits through my son's decision to live with me, forced me to go to Family Court to obtain the necessary orders confirming my son's wishes. This was my first case, and my first win.

The next semester was once again busy with studying, as in law you are obligated to read a lot of material to obtain a firm grasp of the law and the issues involved.

In June 2002 after the University semester finished I went to buy some books on Islam from the Islamic bookshop at Mayland Markaz (centre). In one book on the later prophets of Islam, I read the verses calling the Jews, Christians and the People of the Book, as the Jews and Christians are referred to by God. *"He hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture with truth, confirming that which was (revealed) before it, even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel."* (Qur'an 3:3) The verses were just what I had been waiting a long time for. They were God's words calling to the non-Muslims confirming the previous revelations and the messages of the line of prophets. It also confirmed what I personally believed, that is that God is One and the Creator, Day of Judgment will occur and that Jesus (peace upon him) was a Prophet, as I had thought of him as a child. I also realized that if Muslims had come to me sooner, I would have reverted earlier. All praise is due to Allah for God taking mercy on me and guiding me to the truth and to the straight path.

I also had a good friend who was a practising Muslim, who knew me for six years, yet in all that time, we had never talked about religion; me not asking - and him not telling. There was a kind of stand-off, as if perhaps he sensed my prejudice. He states today that of the non-Muslims he knew, he always thought that one day I would be one to receive the guidance from Allah.

Continuing from above, after I had read those verses from the Qur'an, I and my Muslim friend went down to Rivervale Masjid together. I ended up giving Shahadah,

and I have never looked back since that date. I have a personal peace and tranquility today, which reminds me of when I was a child. I know where I am going and what is expected of me. I know my obligations and responsibilities to my family, friends and my neighbours. I finally know where I fit in this giant mosaic of life, Alhamdulillah (Praise be to Allah).

I am clean from drugs, alcohol, swearing, music, television and fornication. I am more considerate of others, and in fact understand their positions and can empathize with the non-Muslims, as I was once in their shoes, only a little while ago.

As a revert I know that all of us, Muslims and the non-Muslims alike, need to be reminded of the truth, and the straight path that Allah has ordered us to follow.

All praise is due to Allah that in my first year as a Muslim I have completed all the five requirements of Islam: I believe in Allah, the One and Only; I pray five times a day waking before dawn for the Fajr prayer; I have paid my zakat (required charity for the poor); I have fasted in Ramadan, and have immensely enjoyed my Hajj experience to Makkah and Madinah.

I enjoy excellent relations with my family and children and they too have seen the huge improvement in me, and also in my son. God willing I look forward to settling down once again to start afresh a new family and commitments.

* * *

In my closing comments I want to remark on what I have seen in the twelve months as a revert Muslim: Firstly it is imperative to note that Muslims are only allowed to live in the Kuffar (non-Muslim) lands if they are giving Dawah, which is calling non-Muslims to Islam. I am concerned at what I see in the broader Muslim community, and this begs the inference that Muslims do not really understand their own religion. The amount of dunya (worldly life) worship and un-Islamic behaviour can not be blamed on any Jews, USA or The West. In my opinion, those who want to know Islam truly, must not look to the Muslims, because the Muslims today are for the most part not a good example for Islam.

Learning Islam needs to be done through the books. Islam is not a man-made religion and those who want Islam must take Islam direct from Allah and His Messengers. They must study and learn it through the guidance of the trusted scholars and disregard the Islam talked about by the Muslims today, because he who takes his Islam from people will be misguided and led by the thoughts and misconceptions of the people. God Himself talks about Himself and the acceptable way to Him so we must go to God directly if we truly want to know Him as no-one knows God better

than He Himself.

The Muslims must take responsibility for their own actions. Twisting of the ayat (verses of the Qur'an) to suit the kuffar lifestyle is an abomination to God and Allah's punishment may be forthcoming, in the remainder of this life, or definitely in the Hereafter.

God clearly says that the believers are to hang on to his rope. Do not think for one minute that Heaven is an easy ticket to get hold of. Besides where in Heaven do you want to end up e.g. 1st, 2nd... or the 7th heaven, with Allah the Almighty.

My expectations of the Muslim Ummah were high when I reverted, and having witnessed their condition, I must admit it is a bitter disappointment. The undermining by western oriented Islamic labelled organizations that attack our Islamic values and deviate our women from the straight path, is a sad truth. The apologizing leadership further ferments discord in the community, whereas in reality, the Imams of the Ummah are supposed to be our shields. Muslims, do not need to apologize for the Truth, period.

Allah has told us to practice his deen and to give Dawah to the non-Muslims. The truth of Islam only hurts those who are Munafiq (Hypocrites) and those who live the truth and are reminded of the strict practice of Islam whilst continuing to adopt it are exemplary and are destined to receive the only reward, that is Heaven.

As a Muslim I am compelled by Allah to speak the truth of what I see. It is clear the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad, peace and blessing be upon him, and from properly and highly educated scholars, are all we need to focus upon. We Muslims need to ascertain the origin of any Islamic practice to ensure it is either from Qur'an or the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh) as they are the only legitimate sources.

Similar to the legal training I have, we need to find the source of any comment on the practice of Islam. I could say a lot more about the problems in the Muslim community, however this is not the forum for it, and the aim here is to switch people back and onto Islam, not off it. The problems are big, but the power of Allah is always bigger, remember to cling to his rope for salvation.

Often instead of looking at what we need to do to get to heaven from today on, look at it from the other way. I want the seventh heaven, so how do I get there? I have found this method simple and positive, and you will find that Islam strips away the unnecessary worldly fixations, and allows you to live a simple clean life. Always

remember that the reward is not here and now, but in the hereafter. For the hereafter is for Eternity.

Fortunately I will finish on a positive note and that should give the non-Muslims in the audience comfort that their inquiries and research are leading to the Truthful path. The revert in the Muslims Community are, in my opinion, generally the closest to the true practice of Islam.

I do not consider that the convert elements of the community are better than, or superior in some way to the born Muslims within the community. Of course, amongst the Muslims there are people who are seen to be better than others, or the best in knowledge of Islam and Allah. And Allah himself says, "Don't consider yourself the best because Allah alone knows who is the best, because the best of you is he who has the greatest fear of God (taqwa) because the fear of God is in the heart and only Allah sees the heart."

When I mentioned that there are people who seem better than others in their practice of Islam, this is only from my assumed and human knowledge, but I recognize that only Allah truly knows people's hearts. However, converts are born and raised in the wrong spiritual environment, and in the darkness of batel (opposite of haqq), so when they see the right and the light of truth, they stick to it strongly and are scared to stray far from it, because they know what it is to live in the dark.

The women who cover up, and men that pray at the Masjid to please their Lord are examples similar to that of the time of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and his companions, in that they parallel their discovery of the revealed truth and how they were quick to adopt its creed into their daily life, and as totally as possible. I consider that the revert Muslims are striving for the highest standard of Islamic practice, and God willing will be rewarded by Allah in the Hereafter, for their recognition of the truth and their living by the truth thereof. They are an example for the born-Muslims who are struggling in what is in reality one of the most difficult lands in the world in which to cling to the rope of Allah and practice their religion.

In Search of Peace

Hanan Conroy

*"For them is the abode of peace with their Lord.
He will be their Protecting Friend because of what they used to do."*

Qur'an 6:127

I grew up in a white working class town surrounded by white working class attitudes. I am a fifth-generation Australian with mostly English and Irish heritage.

As a child I attended a Pentecostal, Charismatic church where I learned that salvation was accepting the blood of Jesus and receiving the Holy Ghost (talking in tongues.) I was baptised there and "received the Holy Spirit". The members of my church were good, honest people with strong values, yet I never felt comfortable there. I was never felt at ease with lifting my hands into the air and singing and dancing about. It seemed to be irreverent somehow.

When I was eleven I was isolated. I had no friends and I was teased at school. My home life, also, was less than perfect. I started suffering from a deep depression that would stay with me for years, having mood swings from deep, suicidal depression to euphoria. This was a blessing and a curse - curse because sometimes I became so depressed that I wanted to die (and I tried a few times to take my own life); a blessing because it created a soul hunger which would eventually lead me to Allah.

As a teenager I noticed that Australians, generally, had everything materially that anyone could ever need or want. But there seemed to be something lacking. We seemed to be living in a spiritual void ... soul poverty! I was told that I needed a dream and that dream was to look beautiful; buy my own house and car; get drunk a lot; sleep with lots of men, and then settle down to a family and career. But what did I really want? My moods were so crazy that all I wanted was Peace.

At school I was taught the evolution theory. It had nearly destroyed my belief in God. Yet when I was in my bleakest and most despairing of moods, I would always cry to Him for help. Out of a soul hunger I became an extremist Christian. My best friend and I would spend lengthy hours debating the merits of many things, usually coming up with the idea that everything that didn't fit into our dogma was evil. I became disillusioned with my own fanaticism and left Christianity behind. I decided that Jesus wasn't God, but a great Man.

I decided, after a while, to become a Buddhist. I was attracted to the ideas of tolerance, compassion, defeating ego and non-attachment to worldly things. Then spiritual hunger led me to search for God in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Astrology, New Age, Pop Psychology, Shamanism and Witchcraft.

Pop Psychology taught me that all my problems were my mother's fault. New Age taught me that all knowledge was within me, that I knew what was best at all times. My higher self controlled all things, I believed. If a truck hit me then it was to do with the doings of my subconscious, as a result of "negative thinking." (So much for defeating ego!) I became self-worshipping, self-obsessed and self-righteous. Selfish.

Yet I still wanted to look into every religion that I could – except Islam, I told myself, since it was so terrible to women. And yet the sound of Muslim prayers would feel like a wave of purity and joy washing through me.

During my quest I fell in love with a beautiful man and moved in with him. We had a secret wedding – just the two of us where we promised each other that we would be together until our "souls paths separate" - meaning when I re-incarnated I wanted to be with him again. We had three beautiful boys together and moved to Byron Shire to be closer to the New Age thing.

Our life together, however, has been difficult. He had chronic backache and I had chronic mood swings. We lived in poverty (of the Australian variety, not severe like in the third world). My hatred towards my family left me isolated and lonely.

For a while we became Hare Krishna's. They have the most delicious food. Yet they worshipped a statue of Krishna and for some reason a basil plant. (No matter how much I love Pesto I still can't bring myself to worship it). I was a vegetarian, yet when I was pregnant with my second child; I craved steak, so much for not eating sacred cows! I also craved olives. Praise be to Allah! I went and found some Olive and Tomato dip from some Muslims at the local markets. I ate it all myself. I stopped going to the Hare Krishna farm. I was uncomfortable with the idolatry (and the guilt over the steak) even though they offered good reasons for it.

In the midst of poverty I was self-pitying. Then I received, what I now realise to be, a message from Allah, telling me to go and count everything that had been given to me. To my disappointment, everything I had was given to me. "Hey wait a sec..." I thought, "EVERYTHING I have has been given to me". I stopped feeling impoverished and started feeling blessed.

I started asking questions about my New Age beliefs. Could I really have that much control over a truck that hit me? If I could, then it meant I was omnipotent and could control all things. I decided that I had a very limited power to affect anything in the universe. If something happened then it just happened! It was easier to accept things as they were than trying to control everything with my mind.

What about being carefree? The idea of "Everything's OK as long as it doesn't cause suffering"? One individual behaving badly might not upset society too much. What happens if one woman gets cosmetic surgery? Nothing much. What happens if many women get cosmetic surgery because of personal decisions? If cosmetic surgery were to become the norm, then all women would be under much pressure to conform. Maybe there should be a group standard of morality to live by, I mused.

And what about the drugs that had destroyed the lives of many hippies? They were not necessarily any better off than the "religious types" they love to condemn. Hippies get angry; they can be abusive and intolerant just like any other human. As a hippie I tended to not do much but start things I never finished and daydream a lot. Surely something can be said for self-discipline? And putting *Self* first just made me selfish and obnoxious. Maybe putting a greater power before myself would help me to realise that others are important too! Hating my family just made me lonely. I forgave my poor mother for being human. Motherhood gave me an appreciation of the hard work my mother did to raise me. Maybe respecting parents wasn't such a bad idea! And this, I was to find, was true: "*Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour*" Qur'an 17:23.

If you have no morals to live by, then you can question the validity of any value: It's OK to do scientific experiments on aborted embryos because it helps people. But what about the other problems it causes? Religions at least have standard morals. And why did Religions outlast political fashions and ideals such as Communism? Why were so many people following religion if it was such a terrible thing? Surely it would have some merit.

If EVERYTHING was given to me then the only thing I really had was my freedom to choose God or deny God.

By the time son no. 3 was born, we had returned to church. Still I did not feel comfortable there. I didn't want to lift my hands to worship Jesus. Was he God or Man? And how would I be sure that the Evolution Theory wasn't real? And jumping and shouting seemed to be an irreverent way to worship God.

Thanks be to Allah I found a good homoeopath who treated my depression. My black moods lifted by 90%. I could think clearer than I had in years. So with a clear mind I discovered Islam. This I did as follows:

When the terrorist attacks on September 11 occurred I suddenly found myself going to the library looking for books on Islam. I was curious about this religion that everyone was talking about.

In May of this year I signed up for a course called "Towards Understanding Islam" run by the same Muslims who made that yummy olive and tomato dip. When they explained what Islam was, I felt as if a Mack truck covered in pillows had hit me! Wow! I learned the truth about Islam. How it values peace and equality and doesn't treat women badly at all. I learned the real reasons for women wearing loose and unrevealing garments. I loved the understanding of God and the idea of Submission. It felt like I had finally found the peace I had been longing for. But I wouldn't admit it, not yet!

I found myself looking up Islam on the Internet, which is where I came across the Islam-Australia (www.islam-australia.net) website after staying awake late one night arguing with my sister about religion. I decided to ask them for help. My sister had wanted to know how Islam could give me a personal relationship with God? The answer: Muslims pray five times a day, giving a direct and personal relationship with God.

My sister and I argued about the divinity of Jesus, and Islam-Australia helped me to figure out the question for myself by sending me a book and a video on the subject. (Jesus is a Prophet). They also sent me a wonderful book called "The Evolution Deceit" by Harun Yahya. I was impressed by the scientific way he handled the subject. Thank Allah I no longer believe in Evolution.

Islam-Australia also helped me with the question I asked them about the Prophethood of Muhammad. Was he the last of the prophets? Yes he was:

"O People, no prophet or apostle will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and my example, the Sunnah and if you follow these you will never go astray." (from the Last Sermon of the Prophet)

Meanwhile, one of my teachers from the course met me whilst I was out shopping. She asked me if I wanted to come to a ladies group on Fridays. I'm so glad I attended. I was the only one who went for many weeks. It gave me a chance to observe the

Muslim way of life up close. Funny, but they didn't have big teeth and claws and a garage full of explosives! They were generous and kind and fed me lots of olive and tomato dip. I witnessed prayers first hand. I also found that they never brought up religion unless I asked first. For all their "orthodox" look, I found them to be more compassionate and tolerant than many "peace loving hippies" I had known.

At some point I became restless, and knew that I wanted to become a Muslim. I had witnessed a woman saying her Shahadah and decided that I wanted to say mine. So, six days later, on 31st July 2003 I said Shahadah, surrounded by love and good will. I felt as if I had finally come home!

Islam has everything the soul needs for nourishment. It has everything an individual and a family and a community needs. It's holistic, and down to earth, and spiritual - all at the same time. It is humbling. My ego doesn't like me saying "Allahu Akbar" when I pray. What! I'm not the centre of the universe? No, Allah is. At the end of every prayer I thank Allah for bringing me to Him.

It has been two months since I have become a Muslim. I am more grounded and more centred, and by far less selfish. I am happy. I am at peace.

Islam: My Chosen Religion

Aref

*As for those who believe in Allah, and hold unto Him,
them He will cause to enter into His mercy and grace,
and will guide them unto Him by a straight road.*

Qur'an 4:175

Why Islam?

We are in the unique situation of having intelligence to be able to ask ourselves "what is the purpose of my existence?" We have free will to seek and follow the truth. By seeking and following the truth we can find a purpose to our existence and achieve inner peace.

I have chosen Islam (which means submission to Allah) as my truth to "what is the purpose of my existence?" I continue to follow Islam, and further journey along its path, the straight path to the Truth. Allah is the Greatest.

How did I find Islam?

I was introduced to Islam through my intention of marriage to a friend whose religion was Islam. Therefore, it could be said that love introduced me to Islam. But ultimately it was a greater love for God, that I accepted Islam. All praise be to God.

What is my background?

I am an Australian man, 27 years old. I was 26 years of age when I publicly accepted Islam. I spent 9 months prior to that studying Islam, before accepting it.

Prior to Islam I did not ascribe to any particular religion, but as with most Australians, I had a weak background of Christianity. During my upbringing I was never baptised, never attended church and never taught any particular beliefs. However, I was still taught good conduct and virtues, despite no firm religious guidance. As with most Australian children I looked forward to receiving chocolate eggs at Easter (Easter Bunny) and new toys at Christmas (Santa Claus) from my parents and relatives.

My exposure to Christianity as a child was mostly outside the family household. I attended a Religious class, one year in primary school, and can recall the stories of Abraham and the Sacrifice, and the story of David and Goliath, being taught – all these stories are also mentioned in the Qur'an.

I received a children's Bible as a gift at one time, and during my early high school days I received a pocket-book of the Psalms, which was handed out to all the students.

As a child I can recall several occasions, when I felt troubled, asking the help of God. In later years my belief in God was dimmed, over-shadowed by the day-to-day routine of work, study, and sleep.

Learning Islam prior to my conversion...

"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star, (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light. Allah guideth unto His light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is Knower of all things."
Qur'an 24:35

Islam was to be my guiding light. Islam strengthened my soul, increased my faith in God, and changed the way I viewed the world.

However, the study of Islam prior to conversion, was difficult in my case. This was made difficult with world events, society, work colleagues, friends and family seemingly against Islam. Each morning after waking up I would ask myself, "Why go through all the hardships to become a follower of Islam?" But this was simply a test and could only be answered by being a follower of Islam.

Therefore, I started reading several articles on Islam, followed by reading a translation of the Qur'an. I wanted to witness first hand what the Qur'an was all about, and then form my own opinion.

I was fortunate, that during this time I knew another Muslim brother working for the same company. I am grateful to him for helping in all matters concerning Islam. I can recall a problem I had with establishing prayer at work, and how the brother offered advice, and a prayer rug, giving me the confidence to perform prayer in this place.

My first visit to a mosque was a positive experience. The mosque was an old house that had been converted. It was unique and felt very welcoming. While at the mosque I listened to a discussion on Islam and then observed the procedure of a person reverting to Islam – it was a relatively simple procedure. Muslims at the mosque

were friendly and helpful and not at all forceful.

The day I publicly accepted Islam...

"And Allah summoneth to the abode of peace, and leadeth whom He will to a straight path." Qur'an 20:25

My acceptance of Islam was not a spur of the moment decision. It was a serious decision based on more than nine months of considering Islam. I did not know everything about Islam, but agreed with those fundamental beliefs of Islam, that I knew about.

I officially converted to Islam on the 26 July 2002 by taking the oath (known as the Shahadah) in front of many witnesses after the Friday congregation prayer. Early on that day I felt nervous but was sure of my conversion to Islam. Walking to the mosque, prior to conversion, I can recall noticing the nice weather and feeling a sense of confidence, peace and certainty. All praise be to Allah.

How did Islam change my previous reasoning?

Prior to my conversion to Islam I would ask myself "Why am I not given direct knowledge for the purpose of creation?" After accepting Islam, my mind opened to the truth. We are given intelligence, free will, and five senses to seek the answer in the signs of creation. Islam explains that creation is a sign of God, that our purpose is to worship (prayers and actions) Allah. That life is a test, and that our good and bad deeds will be brought before us, after our death, on Judgement Day.

As a scientifically minded person, prior to conversion to Islam, I believed that science "explains" everything. After accepting Islam, my mind opened to the truth that Allah created science. The Qur'an confirms today's scientific knowledge, something that was not available to the people at the time of it's revelation.

With so many religions and the possibility of distortion, prior to conversion to Islam I would ask myself "Why must I follow a particular religion?" After accepting Islam, my mind opened to the truth that Islam confirms previous scriptures, confirms the Oneness of God, and its message, preserved in the Qur'an, is identical to what was revealed to the final prophet - Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and has not been altered in anyway since.

Advice for people considering Islam

It is with great sadness that I see Islam, the religion of peace, being associated with

many misunderstandings and misconceptions, deterring people from Muslims and Islam. I encourage people to make their own judgement after seeking knowledge about Islam. This is best expressed in the words of Al Tufayl ibn 'Amr al Dawsi, a nobleman of great poetic talent, prior to his conversion to Islam:

"Woe to me! Am I, the intelligent poet, the mature man, to fear that I may not distinguish between the genuinely beautiful and the really ugly in human discourse? Shouldn't I go to Muhammad, hear all that he has to say, and apply my own judgement? If I find it good, why shouldn't I accept it? And if I find it evil, surely I shall avoid it." [p119, "The Life of Muhammad", Haykal]

Note:

Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) is the final Messenger of Allah, and is the most respected in Islam; who revealed Allah's message in the form of the Glorious Qur'an, recited to him by the angel Gabriel.

No Choice in the Matter

as related to Insight* with their kind permission

Janet's Story

*"And such as Allah doth guide there can be none to lead astray.
Is not Allah Exalted in Power, (Able to enforce His Will), Lord of Retribution?"*
Qur'an 39:37

She was a thoroughly modern young Australian woman - successful in her business and social life, enjoying the close ties of parents and siblings. So who would suspect that it was the destiny of such a young woman to become Muslim?

Her very first sign of interest in Islam was quite early in her adult life when she purchased a book about Islam from a Christian bookshop in Sydney. "Did that lead you in some way to Islam?" we asked. "Well, actually, I bought it but I never did read it," she replied. We wondered whether, in fact, the book had been pro or anti Islam, but that was never fated to be an issue.

Her life continued on very pleasantly, and among her friends was a young Jewish woman. They had a close relationship with the exchanging of gifts on Christian and Jewish religious festivals. Religion was never an issue, nor was it ever anticipated that it would be.

The second remembered step towards Islam was when she met a young Armenian Orthodox Christian man. "Oh, you would have met Muslims then!" she greeted. "Muslims! Muslims! I hate Muslims!" he vehemently stated. "Oh dear," she thought. "Why do you hate Muslims then?" she asked him. "I don't know," he said, "I just do!" This was to lead to a further step in her journey to Islam, for she was amazed that a person, or persons, could have such hatred without realizing why it was so. Perhaps this was the factor which made her wish to know more.

Her work took her to many towns and cities, and as she travelled she listened to the radio. One day she had tuned to 2FC and found that there was a series entitled "The World of Islam," being broadcast. She was so impressed by what was being said that she stopped and took down notes. To this day she says that it was very well produced and that everything which was said, was correct.

Her life went on as usual until about twelve months later when she was driving through Lakemba in Sydney, and saw the Mosque standing there. "A Mosque!" she

mused. Suddenly, applying the brakes, she turned. Parking in front, she boldly walked up the steps and through the main entrance. "Hello," she addressed one of the brothers, "What's your religion about?" She now smiles as she remembers how religiously naive she was at that time.

She was given a Qur'an and some pamphlets, and told that she had really come to the wrong entrance and that there was a Ladies' association down the road. This she took in good part, and eventually, when she returned, she was introduced to some sisters, and week by week she attended classes in religious education.

She smilingly recalls that she used to wear Fire-Engine red lipstick to these classes, and gradually, with increase in knowledge and the help of one of our sisters, became aware that this was really not part of the Islamic code.

Week by week she came and learned, and when it came to the profession of faith, she thought, "Ah! I only have to believe that Allah is the only God and that Muhammad is His Messenger. I believe that already. I am, therefore, a Muslim." Saying nothing to her Muslim sisters, she kept attending. One day, one of the sisters said to her, "Have you ever thought of becoming Muslim?" "Oh," replied our new sister, "I am a Muslim already!" Thus it was that she was told how profession of Islam, the Shahadah, should take place in front of two or more witnesses. Quite nonchalantly she said, "Oh, alright then."

Strangely, as she repeated slowly the words in Arabic (followed by the words in English), which gave the witness; and for the first time, seeing the Sheikh in his turban and flowing robes, she became aware of the seriousness of her decision. "It was as sacred as if I had been married," she told us.

The next weekend, when she saw her parents, without any warning she told them that she had converted to Islam. Although shocked, they accepted that this was her decision. In fact, as she described the comparison between Christianity and Islam, her mother said, "Oh, then I have really been a Muslim always." Both parents were influenced to study Islam, her father even attending University classes on the subject. As for her Jewish friend - she could never quite accept that Islam had claimed Janet, and although both tried to continue the friendship, they found that Zionism was too strongly opposed to an Islamic stand.

Actually, all were amazed, for during these many weeks of studies, she did not think to mention her interest in Islam at all, thereby stunning most who knew her. Today she feels that had she done so, they may have tried to deter her, and perhaps, just perhaps, she may have, in her lack of knowledge, been influenced. Therefore, she

says, "It was my fate to be Muslim and I was not to be deterred. Really, I had no choice in the matter, it was my destiny to be Muslim."

Note:

Those who know Janet are happy to tell you that she has, over the years, continued on the Straight Pathway of Allah. She has worked hard in the field of daawah and women's issues. She has been blessed and is a blessing.- Ed.

* Insight Magazine - the quarterly journal of IFEW (Islamic Foundation of Education and Welfare).

Islam: The Straight Path

As presented at Curtin University, Perth, WA
on 12th April 2003

Rifaat Halford

*"Verily We take upon Ourselves to guide,
And verily unto Us (belong) the End and the Beginning."*

Qur'an 92:12,13

I was born in Geraldton, Western Australia about 35 years ago. I was supposedly born as a Christian, although I never practiced. I took scripture training in primary school, which is basically just a non-denominational study of the Bible. I did pretty well at it and took an interest in the life of Jesus. I could see from the writings that Jesus was the genuine article, and if you followed what he said and did, you couldn't go far wrong. So I followed that during school.

Towards the end of primary school my Mother became involved with a man who was anti-religion, so I was basically discouraged from practicing any religion for a fair while. They split up, and when I was in my late teens I joined the army. Man did I learn some stuff there! One of the biggest things I learnt was drinking, and you couldn't beat me at it. I could out-drink everybody, it didn't matter how big you were, I could out-drink you. Not a good thing, because that really caused me a lot of trouble, which I'm still paying for today.

I learned a lot of lessons in that time. There was no religion. There was nothing in my life at that stage. Don't worry about *the beaten track*, I was way off the puff. I was out in the wilderness!

I left the military in the mid 1990's. I started getting into trouble with virtually every man and his dog. Nothing serious, just traffic infringements and all that sort of stuff. I was still out in the wilderness! Personal relationships were not working; I had fines coming in from every angle, and I couldn't find work.

I sat back and I thought, "what are you doing man? You're lost." I'm trying to find the way back on to the path, but I don't even know where I am on the map; but there's One Who knows the map, He wrote the map, and that's The Big Guy. So I thought, "I know what I'll do, I'll start looking into religion." So being Church of England born, I went to the Church of England. I started participating in Church services, and was going to communion twice a week.

By nature, I'm a person who asks questions. This is not because I doubt what you're telling me, it's just that I want to get everything sorted out in my mind. I know it's place and as the other Brother said, the Holy Trinity . . . Man! I could talk to the Priest I'd say to him "Explain this Holy Trinity to me man it's like I can't get this in my head". So we'd sit down, he'd explain the Holy Trinity and I'd say "Oh right thanks man", and I'd go to take two steps, and then think, "I still don't understand". I don't know how many times I've had the Trinity explained to me, and every time lost it. I couldn't even explain to you now, how it's meant to work. I know the theory of it, but I can't get it straight in my head!

Qurantically we are told: "*They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the One God. If they desist not from so saying a painful doom will fall on those of them who disbelieve.*" Qur'an 5:73

So that was one of the big question, and I had a lot of other questions for them too. I'd sit and read the Bible and I'd read things like: Jesus is the son of God but, he is God. I'd read in the Bible that Jesus was out in the desert and the Devil offered him the world if he turned his back on God and worshipped him. I was thinking, "how can you turn your back on yourself? How can you prostrate to the Devil if you're God?" Because God created the Devil, He's the Creator of everything. He can't prostrate to the Devil, it's not possible. So I came up with all these questions. I'd go to the priest and I'd say to him "How does this work?" And after a while, I got this answer that a lot of Christians get: "Don't ask questions, you have to have faith."

Wow! Did that pour the water on the fire for me? As soon as you say that, I'm out the front door, because if it's just follow blindly without thinking, don't sign me up for that. I've got to understand what it is, so I started to lose interest, and then one day I just had this gut feeling.

I'd had an interest in the Middle East for many, many, years, although I had never really taken a lot of notice of Islam. I'd hear the Azan called on TV, you'd see it on TV shows and I always used to sit and think, wow what's that? And it had a magical sound to my ears, so one day I had this gut feeling, I wanted to learn about Islam and I wanted to learn Arabic. So I opened the phone book, the only thing I could find even remotely close to it was The Australian Islamic College. I thought, "Yep, that will do. *Islamic*. They must know about Arabic. I'll go there!"

So I walked into Dianella, and at this stage there was not an influx of people becoming revert like there is now. A white Anglo Saxon walking in there saying, "I want to learn Arabic, and I want to learn about Islam". They must have thought, "What the hell is this? What are we going to do with this guy?" So they did a bit of ringing

around, and they rang a guy who is now one of two special Brothers. Whether I was a Muslim or not, he would still be my Brother, one of two special Brothers I have, Rifaat Fouda. He taught me Arabic and he taught me the Pillars of Islam and this was during 1993, '94, '95.

I didn't actually do anything with it, however. I was now coming back towards the path, and straight back out to the bush, again. Then, I dropped the whole thing, and I went completely off the path. At this time I was really one of those the Qur'an speaks about: *"These are they who have bartered Guidance for error: but their traffic is profitless, and they have lost true direction."* Qur'an 2:16

I had a lot of trouble with the cops, with fines. I lost my license; lost my two cars; lost my flat, and much to my shame, by the age of thirty, I ended up sleeping on the floor of a one bedroom pensioner apartment that my Mother had, and I just couldn't understand how I could have gone to this. I spent three years being depressed. Some days I didn't even get out of bed, I would just get up and look at the watch, 10 o'clock in the morning, and think, "Why do I have to get out of bed today? Nup, just roll over and go back to sleep." I did that many, many times.

I was actually living in Mandurah at that time, and we moved back to the city, and I made contact with Rifaat again, seeing him quite a few times. And then one day, just on impulse again, I decided it was time to stop messing around: "You've studied Islam before, it's time to do something about it." So I rang Rifaat up and I said "right, I want to be a Muslim now." He probably thought, "What are you talking about?"

So he arranged for me to go up to the Australian Islamic College on Wednesday night for the discussion group they had. A funny little sidepiece for you - his son took me up there and tried to introduce me to Jem Oz and I thought, "I think I may already know him," but I hadn't seen him for five years. I used to sit and talk to him for hours down at Thornlie. So I looked at him again and thought, "Hang on! I do know this guy!" He recognized me. Anyway the long and the short of it is that he's the other Brother that's very special to me. These two guys, Jem Oz and Rifaat Fouda are responsible for a lot of what's happened to me.

I was taking part in the Wednesday night discussion groups by this time, and then Jem said to me one night "The DAWA center has got a lecture on at UWA with a Sheikh from London, Abdur Rahim Green." So I thought, "Oh! Ok! I can handle that." "What's it called?" I asked. "Coca Cola Muslims" they said. "Hey that sounds pretty good! I'll go have a squizzy at that." So off we went.

It was a very interesting lecture and I had some questions on Riba for the Sheikh. Riba is usury, the taking and paying of interest. I went down to talk to him and he was sitting on his chair. He looked like someone had deflated him, I thought he'd been surfing all day! I was talking to him, asking him questions when he said to me "Are you a Muslim?" "Technically no," I said to him. He looked at me and he said "What does that mean? Technically no? You are either a Muslim or you are not a Muslim. What are you talking about?" I said to him "Look, I believe in all the Prophets. Jesus was a prophet, not the Son of God. I believe Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was the last prophet. I believe in the Qur'an, Angels, Judgment Day, the whole shooting match. I believe it all. It's just that I'm trying to learn as much as I can before I become a Muslim, because there are people out there who are going to ask me questions, and I don't want to give them the wrong answer, because you only get one shot at it."

He replied "Nup, that's a cop out, that's an excuse." Then he stood up and put his hands out to me, and he said, "Say the Shahadah now." This was in front of like thirty people. I know what he was saying, he was saying, put your money where your mouth is. He was saying, that if you're saying you're studying it and you believe it all, prove it! So, being by nature a procrastinator, I thought, "I hear you, I'll get around to it in a couple of days". But then I thought, "Yeah, I'll do it!" So I did it right then and there. Like it says in the Qur'an, "*O ye who believe! Fear God as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam.*" Qur'an 3:102.

And if you speak to people who have reverted, ask them how they felt after they said their Shahadah. The one thing I found is that everyone has had a common feeling. That night when I drove home, I didn't drive home, I flew home. I really felt like I was on a magic carpet. I was ready to tell everyone. I didn't care who, I would have told George Bush if I could have found him! I was the happiest I'd been for years. It's like "Wow!". I told my Mum, she wasn't particularly concerned, she's never been upset about it. Family members? Yeah, I've told some of them; no one said anything bad to me. I've got a Born-Again Christian neighbour, he doesn't think too much of it, but that's all right!

It's funny though how people treat you initially. The reaction is: "What the hell have you done?" It's like I've had a sex change! That's the sort of treatment some people get. It's like "What have you done man?" "Oh I've become a Muslim." "Oh you're not going to Afghanistan with Bin Laden are you?" "Well I wasn't thinking of it, but is that an offer!" That's the sort of treatment you get.

After a while people get used to the idea and they start asking you questions

like "Hey, what do you guys think of Jesus?" and that sort of thing. And one of the areas that really surprised me when I began to study Islam was that Jesus actually has a higher profile in Islam. A higher profile than he did in Christianity; he's thought of better. He's the only human being ever not to have committed sin. And I mean, look at what the Christians believe and look at what the Muslims believe, and he has a special status. He's not worshipped, but he has a special status in the whole deal. Now when Christians find out that we are waiting for him to return they still have the same response - they think I'm joking. I get to the situation now where a lot of people are saying, "Well what about this, and what about that?" Ninety-Nine-point-nine per cent (99.9%) of any of the negative stuff is now gone, and they are just more curious. I find people are thinking about it lately.

Since I've said the Shahadah, my life has gone from like that to like this. I've got a couple of Jihads going - which for those of you who don't know, doesn't mean holy war, it means I've got a couple of struggles. One of them is against my procrastination, that's my biggest one. If you're going to be a Muslim you actually have to do something about it.

Some of my other Jihads are connected to my now studying Law. Whilst I'm studying Law, I've got I don't know how many cases I'm fighting over on the side, we're fighting ASIO; we're fighting ASIC; we're fighting the Police. It's like, man! It's almost like the conflict in Iraq, and I'm on the receiving end. I've got all these people out there with all these resources. We've got nothing... but, insha'Allah we are beating them.

So it's a case of, at the age of 35, it feels like I have had a mission revealed to me. I've actually found what I'm meant to do. It's taken me 35 years to find out I have to be in Law; to help the people who can't help themselves. But as I said to someone the other day, there's a much, much better man than me that had his mission revealed to him at the age of 40, and that was the Prophet. He started getting revelations at the age of 40 and I'm like, "Why was he at that age?" Maybe it's because he had to live his life and get wisdom in his head before he could understand what he was getting. There's no point in been given a tool, if you don't know what to do with it. And I think that with a lot of the things that have happened to me in the past, I didn't actually appreciate what I had; what to do with it; and how to go about it. I had to have all the suffering; all the trouble with booze; and people giving me a hard time. And I wouldn't take one part of it back, because if I took any of it back, I might not be standing here talking to you now.

The biggest thing that's ever happened in my life, other than being born of

course, was that evening in March last year at UWA when I said the Shahadah. Everything from there has just grown - instead of having like five friends, I've got five hundred and five friends, and I know they are all genuine friends. I could ring any of them up and say "Hey man I need this, what can you do about it?" And if they couldn't help me, they'd do their best to find someone who could. And joining the Islamic community in Perth is, I couldn't even describe it to you, it's a very, very different community. As the Brother said, the answer to racism is right here for you, in Islam. People look at the Muslims as being one big community and yet you've got every cultural background going, which sometimes doesn't work in our favour! But it's a good thing, we get to mix with all sorts of people, and learn how they think.

I haven't been discriminated against in the wider community. For some reason people don't want to play around with me! Maybe it's the way I look, I don't know, but some people have been discriminated against in Perth. I know of one lady who has had her hijab ripped off her in the bus, but I haven't had anything happen to me.

I now have the ability to walk into the court, and I just tell it like it is, and people say to me, "How can you walk into a court room and say to a Judge that he's wrong and it's this, and this, and this, and this?" What are they going to do to me, shoot me? I don't think so. Are they going to fine me? Well I've already got lots of them. Are they going to put me in jail? Well I can practice Islam better in jail, because there are no distractions! What are they going to do to me?

So at the end of the day, my belief in Allah, motivates me. Actually one of the things we were taught is that, if you fear no one but Allah, he'll make his creation fear you. I don't fear anybody at all. I'll tell George Bush that too, if I get my hands on him, but that's another story. I don't fear any of these people, so the guys - a Judge, big deal; a Policeman - doesn't mean that they are not wrong! Everyone's got the ability to be wrong.

"It is only the devil who would make (men) fear his partisans. Fear them not; fear Me, if ye are true believers." Qur'an 3:175.

As I have said, I now feel I know what my mission is. I've got the belief that I can follow it through, even if it ends up fatal. Not that it will, but even if it ends up that I'm in danger. There are people floating around in Perth - and I've told this story before but never to a public meeting - an American guy I've known for six years turned out to be working for the CIA in Perth. He didn't know I'd said the Shahadah, he thought I was just studying it. He turned around and said

to me "We want you to work for us."

I can't repeat what I said to him because I wouldn't say that in front of the ladies, but it went like this, "No man", so he started. There are only two techniques that these people use: *we'll give you something, or we'll take something away*. The offers didn't work so the threats started. I just said to him "You know where I live" and he actually threatened to put me into a mental institution. I said "Fine, if you can get me out of the house, do what you want." He said to me "There's not going to be two, or three, or four of us, there will be twenty of us." I said "Maybe there will be, but I'll get half a dozen of youse first." And they basically left me alone. What they were looking for was for me to be an informant within the community. What I was going to tell them, I don't know? Like the Brother said, if you're going to go looking for terrorists then it's going to be a hell of a long job.

There are all sorts of funny little things that have happened on the side, but in retrospect, if I didn't have all of the bad things happen to me in my life, I wouldn't be here today. What I was given, and they say that we were brought into this by Allah - not by this guy talking to me, or that guy talking to me - so if He wanted me to be a Muslim, which I truly believe he did, then, if I wasn't here today where would I be? What would I be doing?

I sit back and I look at all those troubles and I think, "Those were learning experiences". Every time someone slaps you in the face you learn a lesson. You ask yourself, "Why did they do it? What could have stopped them? How do you stop it from happening again?" and move on. All in all, all the bad stuff has helped me to make up an overall positive picture. So I'm quite happy to be a Muslim, obviously!

* * *

My niece came up to me one day and said "Do you find that the women you found attractive, are different now?" I thought about the answer and I thought, what she's actually asking me without actually saying it, is has my perception changed? So I thought about it. Well on one hand you've got the Western women walking with virtually nothing on; and on the other hand you've got the women in Abayeh and Hijab. Which one would I want? Well, I like that one. I had to say, "Yes! The women I find attractive now are different". I then started looking into the way I think about things, and I noticed how everything is changing. I used to be in to all this nationalism sort of thing, flags. This doesn't interest me any more.

I look at a lot of the things differently. Islam has given me an ability to look at Television in a different light totally. I look at it and laugh at people who come on TV and say, " Oh we are not going to put up with these people - they do this, and this, and this!" And really, it's almost like watching a comedy.

My perception of the whole world is changing, and I find that I like it, looking at the world in a different way.

My Long Journey to Islam

as presented at The University of Western Australia
on 12th July 2003

Umm Anas

It has been quite a long journey to Islam for me, but I wouldn't say I chose Islam, I would say that my Lord chose me to be Muslim; and He chose to guide me towards it.

I wanted to divide my talk into two sections: The first basically a brief introduction to what a Muslim believes, and to clarify one misconception, which is relevant to the second part of my talk, which is my journey to Islam.

Now to proceed with a brief introduction of my beliefs as a Muslim:

Firstly, the misconception that I wanted to clarify is the name of Allah. The name *Allah* is the inauguration of two Arabic words, *Al* and *ilah*. *Al* means *The*, and *ilah* means *God*. Those two words come together and refer to *The God*, which implies *The Only God*, or *The Only True God*. The word is not created by the Muslims or introduced by the Qur'an, it is used by Arabic-speaking people of Jewish descent; Christian descent, and Arabs, from any background when they refer to the Creator. They refer to Him as Allah, The God. And as I shall restate, this word has no gender and cannot be pluralised. I just wanted to clarify this, as it will be relevant later on when I talk about my journey to Islam.

Basically I thought it might be useful if I state briefly what a Muslim believes, before presenting my story.

A Muslim believes in God; whatever God has revealed in the scriptures, and whatever God has revealed to His messengers, all of which we believe is contained in the Glorious Qur'an, the final revelation of God to mankind, as is written:

The Apostle believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one (of them) believeth in God, His angels, His books, and His apostles. "We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His apostles." And they say: "We hear, and we obey: (We seek) Thy forgiveness, our Lord, and to Thee is the end of all journeys." Qur'an 2:285.

From the Qur'an we know the first man created was Adam, and he was given

knowledge from his Lord, and he was tempted by Satan who suggested to Adam and his wife to eat the forbidden fruit. We also believe that after their act of disobedience, Adam and his wife were sent to dwell on the Earth, and that the succeeding generations of mankind were tested in a similar fashion to Adam and Eve, throughout history. We believe that God sent messengers, and raised up righteous men to teach people the path of righteousness, which leads to the salvation of the soul. We believe the body is given an appointed time on the Earth, to be tested, and when this time expires, the soul will be taken to an abode until the last day, when creation will cease, and all mankind will be resurrected and judged according to their beliefs, their actions and their deeds.

"O ye Children of Adam! Let not Satan seduce you, in the same manner as He got your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their raiment, to expose their shame: for he and his tribe watch you from a position where ye cannot see them: We made the evil ones friends (only) to those without faith." Qur'an 7:27

We believe that those who have believed in God's messengers, and followed His message, will be placed in an eternal abode of happiness with no further suffering or tests. Those who have turned away from the messengers and their message, who have refused to live according to God's law, will be in an abode of punishment. Messengers have been sent to every generation, throughout the history of mankind. To name some of these messengers as they are named in the Qur'an, and other scriptures before it, we must mention Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, His final messenger (saw). The Qur'an says that none of the previous scriptures, revealed to previous generations of mankind, have been preserved to our time, and the only scripture that will be preserved is the Qur'an, which will be preserved until the last day.

Now I will proceed:

Anything that I am unable to cover during this short space of time, hopefully will be able to be addressed during the question and answer time.

* * *

To begin with, I was baptized an Orthodox Christian, in a Greek Orthodox Church. My Father was a migrant to Australia arriving at the age of ten, and my Mother was an Australian of many generations, who had been baptized a Catholic. I was raised with Greek customs and traditions; many of which came into play during Christmas and Easter.

I grew up and was educated in the Western suburbs of Sydney, where diversity of religion and culture were virtually non-existent. I had no knowledge of a religion

other than Christianity, and no knowledge of a culture other than that of my family and my community.

I enjoyed attending Bible class during my primary years of school and listening to Scripture stories. During my secondary years the emphasis was placed on achieving grades, and competitiveness in the secular life. Our classes were graded from highest to lowest, or dumbest to smartest, as we saw at that time. Everyone focused on competing with one another in this fashion. Not much time was spent contemplating life or its purpose or what we were meant to do.

Scripture in the secondary years of school was limited to once a term. Some people would come and give a talk, something like this. I never knew why there where differences amongst the Christians, and why there where different denominations in Christianity. The adults around me never seemed to be able to answer these questions.

I always prayed to God in my room quietly, asking God to solve family problems and world problems. I was aware of the Jehovah's Witnesses, when they used to knock on my front door. My Father would take them out the back to have a cup of tea and discuss matters with them. But my household were all warned to stay clear and stay away from these discussions that my Father had with them. We were not allowed to listen in, and if my Father took literature from the Jehovah Witnesses, he would keep it well hidden. Basically my Father's attitude was that you would never change his customs or his beliefs, whether they be right or wrong, and he was determined that his children would do the same.

Then I attended the University of Wollongong in New South Wales and for the first time I met people from a diversity of cultures and religious backgrounds. I joined a circle of friends and associates who were mostly from Greek, Lebanese, or Egyptian descent. I also had a couple of Palestinian friends. This group of friends were truly the warmest and most down to Earth people I had ever met. Religion wasn't a topic of discussion amongst the group, but I always had a habit of asking people if they believed in God. A close friend of mine, from a Russian-Polish background, once responded to my question by saying "Well I'd have to say yes, because of the kind of things you mess around with". I felt that was a very weak response. I wanted to learn more about my religion and become more active in the religion. I joined the Christian Evangelist group at University, and we met once a week for discussions. I felt very out of place at these meetings because I couldn't often relate to what was being said, as so many people were often quite opinionated and had some other strange ideas. One week the topic of discussion was the Trinity. I knew nothing of this concept, and the Orthodox Christianity concept does not exist. So after that meeting I approached one girl and I asked her to explain this concept of Trinity to

me. She was rather disgruntled when I concluded, after the explanation, that the concept of Trinity defied logic and contradicted the Bible. That was my last meeting with the University Christian group.

At that stage I still had no idea that there was more than one version of the Bible, and that the Catholic version contained a statement that it was the Trinity of three Gods, in one. Nevertheless at this point I renounced my title of being Greek Orthodox Christian, and concluded that I was a Christian, without denomination or label.

I reasoned that if the Bible was God's word, and if all Christians believed in the Bible, then why should they have separate Churches and different names. So I had no specific loyalty to the Greek Orthodox Church, although I now know a really interesting piece of history - that the Greek Orthodox Church held closer beliefs to the original teachings of Christ, than some of the other denominations of Christianity.

Again at this point, I had no idea that there were other religions, who also believed in God, in our Creator or for that matter Jesus, God's messenger, until one day I overheard a small group of people from my social circle of friends informing others that they were going to say their prayers. I immediately turned and asked if I could join them, they looked a little bewildered, but they agreed. I followed them to some prayer rooms above the cafeteria. Then they announced that the women pray in one room and the men pray in another, because they were male. I was too shy to enter the female room alone, so I excused myself and went back to continue my lunch.

Later one of them approached me and explained that he was Muslim and that he believed in God. He said that he would get me some literature to read, and an English interpretation of their Holy book if I was interested to know more.

I was surprised at my own ignorance. I thought to myself that in all my life I had never known that there were other religions that also claimed to believe in God. What was worse was that they give up their lunch hour to pray and worship Him. I was ashamed because I had thought that I was religious and a dedicated worshipper, where in reality, I had sacrificed nothing of my life or my time in God's service. I declared that day that I would search the world's religions, and I would make up my mind which one was telling the truth.

I started reading the Muslims' literature and the English interpretation of their book, the Glorious Qur'an. I was careful to keep it well hidden in my house, otherwise I would be in serious trouble from my Father. Every morning and afternoon during my 45 minute bus trip to University I read about Islam. I couldn't put down, the translation of the Qur'an, and I didn't want to stop reading it. It touched my heart, it

described my desires, my thoughts, my feelings; it was specifically enforced; straightforward in its punishments, and generous in its rewards. I believed that it was the truth.

Some of the Christian Lebanese girls and guys at my University noticed my long conversations with the Muslims. They started to warn me against them, they said I was getting lost. So I was wary and cautious, but at the same time I began to realise the false claims of our Christian friends, toward our Muslim friends. I hadn't accepted Islam at this point, but I was full of praise for the Muslims. For their manners and their morals, and their dedication to God.

"If any do deeds of righteousness, - be they male or female - and have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them." Qur'an 4:124.

One day I was watching the movie Malcolm X with Denzel Washington, and I was amazed to learn that Jesus was born in the Middle East, and that he was not a white man with blue eyes as he is portrayed in pictures. I felt I had to come out of Christian deception, to admit that Islam was the truth.

The next morning I swarmed into the University and I excitedly announced to one of my Christian friends that I was going to become a Muslim. He responded with "don't you believe in God?" I said "Yes". He said, "Well Muslims don't believe in God, they believe in Allah". I was devastated. Muslims don't believe in God? I was perplexed. My road to Islam came to a grinding halt. I returned all my literature to its original owners, and the case was closed.

That year my parents separated and I moved with my Mother and my siblings to Perth. My university studies were on hold and my life was empty. I started work as a manager at McDonalds in the city, and I slowly began to make friends. Two of my employees became my best friends; one was German and half Indonesian, the other was half British and half Indonesian. They were both Muslim, but there was no discussion of religion between us, just about boys and music. They took me with them to a birthday party one evening, and there I met a young South African man. We started to talk and we never spent a day apart after that.

After several months of this inseparable relationship the topic of marriage entered the conversation. But there was a problem.... I was a Christian and he was a Muslim, and he thought it was not allowed for us to be married. I was determined never to become a Muslim, certainly not just to be allowed to marry, but in the end, the heartache of losing the one that I loved, pushed me to ask my Indonesian friend to escort me to a local Mosque. This was so that I could make the testimony of faith

that Muslims make, when they convert, which I did. I removed the gold cross from my neck and I kept my beliefs deep in my heart.

My husband and I married and I left my job at McDonalds and returned to my studies at The University of Western Australia.

I was not required by my husband to wear a veil, or to change my life, as my husband had been raised in a Christian dominated society and had most of the customs that I did. We prayed on occasion but it was not constant or regular. We did, however, eat halal food and abstained from eating pork or alcohol. This was easy for me to do, because I had never drank alcohol before I was Muslim, and giving up pork was a small sacrifice to be with the one I loved.

Quite quickly I became pregnant with our first child, and the wife of one of my husband's friends invited me to attend Islamic classes for women. I avoided the invitation for quite a while, deferring to my University studies. Toward the end of my first pregnancy I found myself with a lot of spare time on my hands. I thought it was only fair to learn a little about my husband's religion in order to teach our children, so I finally agreed to go to the Islamic classes.

I convinced another friend of mine to come, as she had converted under much the same circumstances as I had. We thought we had better dress a little conservatively in case the class were all wearing veils, and might take us for hypocrites. So rather than our usual midriff tops and hipsters we managed to put together an ensemble of hipsters, knee length leather jackets, eyeliner (but no lipstick), and a small cloth tied around our hair. We thought we'd fit in nicely with our Muslim friends-to-be, but when we arrived I don't know who was more in shock - them or us!

We walked into the gathering and I was shocked to see people who, at that time, looked to me like impersonators of Mother Mary. They looked so holy, so clean, so innocent with their very long plain veils and their clean sweet faces. My friend and I tried to sit quickly, as we felt our '*modest*' appearance was blaring out in front of the crowd. I started to think to myself, "What kind of a scarf am I wearing? I feel like a gangster in a bandana!" I listened to the lecture with an extra critical ear, determined to prove that the Muslims had got it all wrong.

I continued to attend classes, week by week; listening intently; keeping my hidden agenda close to my chest. My friend didn't continue after the first lesson, so I was in this on my own. The teacher never raised the issue of my dress, this was a matter I'd invite upon myself, later down the track.

I was a thorn in the side of my teacher. I would read books, listen to cassette tapes and so forth, looking for some kind of inconsistency. I would frequently pose tricky questions - but nothing the teacher couldn't handle. I went to an Islamic resource centre and I came across some video tapes of a man called Ahmad Deedat. He was a Muslim scholar of the Christian Bible who challenged the highest-ranking Christian scholars to debate with him on the topics of Christianity and Islam. I quickly decided that if I watched these debates, and the Christians won, I would openly declare Christianity as the truth; and if the Muslims won, I would openly declare Islam as the truth.

Well you are looking at me now, so you don't have to guess who won the debate!

I'd just like to finish with a few verses from the Qur'an where Allah (swt) talks about Christians and Jews. Allah says:-

"And they say, 'None shall enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian.' These are their own desires. Say (O Muhammad), 'Produce your proof if you are truthful.' " Qur'an 2:111

I personally testify that the Muslims are the only ones that can prove that their book is truly from their Creator. I have been through the historic, the scientific, the innate proofs of the Qur'an and the Bible in order to come to the firm conclusion, that Islam has an authentic book, straight from God.

And Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an:-

"And they say, 'Be Jews or Christians, then you will be guided.' Say (to them, O Muhammad) 'Nay, (We follow) only the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham), [Islamic Monotheism, i.e. to worship none but Allah Alone], and he was not of Al-Mushrikun (those who worshipped others along with Allah).'" Qur'an 2:135.

Why hadn't I realized that Abraham was mentioned in the Bible but he was neither a Christian nor a Jew? He was born before both of them, so how did he achieve salvation? Not by following the Ten Commandments of Moses, and not by believing in the supposed death of Jesus, but by believing in The Almighty; by submitting to the revealed scripture of his time. For that matter, what about the first man Adam, how did he achieve salvation? Only Islam has the answer to this question.

And finally, Allah (swt) says:-

"Say (O Muslims), 'We believe in Allah and that which has been sent down to us and that which has been sent down to Ibrahim (Abraham), Isma'il (Ishmael), Ishaq

(Isaac), Ya'qub (Jacob), and to Al-Asbat [the twelve sons of Ya'qub (Jacob)], and that which has been given to Musa (Moses) and 'Iesa (Jesus), and that which has been given to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have submitted (in Islam).''' Qur'an 2 : 136

All praise is due to Allah.

Led by The Creator

As presented at Curtin University, Perth, WA

On 12th April 2003

Abdur Rahman Humes

*"To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth:
When He decreeth a matter, He saith to it: "Be" And it is."*

Qur'an 2:117

I would like to go back in time and tell you a little bit about my history:

My culture is one of the oldest cultures in the world. I love creation. The history of aboriginal people, we connect so closely to the Earth that we are like the Earth. In my younger days as a child as I grew up, I knew what I had learned about the mysteries and spirits, that everything that is made in creation has a spirit, a formed spirit, which guides it and looks after it and also guides us.

When we walked night and day in the bush or wherever, we knew that there was a spirit, a powerful "Go", that looked over us, all the time. Then as I grew up I was taken away to high school. It was then I met this other God - the same God but in a different form. I had to go to Church and pray. I also learnt about racism. I was taken and put in a hostel with about 180 children, (90 boys and 90 girls). It was frightening in a way because I didn't know anybody and I didn't know what to expect, but I stayed there for three years. In those three years I learnt about God, Jesus. I also learnt about other races; I learnt how to be hurtful - how to make people cry - and it was sad really because where I came from, we were all sort of one. The white children and the black children grew up together, sort of as one family.

I left high school and then I went back home. I worked and then I wanted to know God more. I got baptized in the Church of England and I still wanted to know more about God; so I read the Bible a bit, and had meetings with people. I still had my Aboriginal God too, spirits, and it was very hard to know that this God is the same God, you know?

Anyway, I went to lieaps of Churches. I went to the Catholic Church, the Methodists' Church, and every Church that came from England, every church that came from America - I was a part of it. I went from one Church to another, trying to find this God. In 1967 I went to the University of Western Australia, that is where I met Brother Mohammed Rais.

Brother Rais is a Muslim (revert) now. Anyway I knew that I had to find something because I had become kind of rough. For ten years, I became like a madman. I'm only small but I've done some things, some real bad things, and I needed to find a God, so I tried again. I went to people, to houses. People would slam doors in your face. I was a person. I had had a hard life. I wanted everything to change for myself, so, anyway, I struggled on in life. I used to read the Bible to people, people used to come to me and ask me questions and I'd be out there talking about God and Jesus, and I'd be fighting the next day! I would think, "Why am I doing these things, when I know there's someone more powerful - a God, that can help me?"

"O ye who believe! seek help with patient perseverance and prayer; for God is with those who patiently persevere." Qur'an 2:153

So I was like in a washing machine, I was tumbling around; good times then the bad, and so on. I said, "I don't want this; I want more good times in my life". I'd give talks at schools, and I'd tell children what to do, yet I wanted a better life for myself! So anyway, I met this lady. We were together for a while. We would fight, then we'd get back together again. Then we started looking into Muslims. I was with the lady that I'm now with, and I was going to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, one day a week. Then my family would come along and I'd go to the Jehovah Witnesses. I was a little mixed up as to where I was.

Well, anyway, we went for a drive around and tried to find a Mosque. We went to one Mosque and I think it was the right time for me. We went away and we met another brother. The lady I'm with rang up one brother and he said, "Oh yes come around". So we went around, and anyway his sister was home, and she said, "Can you wait outside and my sister will talk to your missus." And I thought this was a bit strange, because at any other time everybody piles into the house, and no-one cares less! Anyway, I waited outside.

My missus spoke to the lady and her sister and we left. Then we were invited back again, and this time the Brother was there. We spoke to him. He was a very nice brother, and told us as much as he could at that time about Islam, and about being a Muslim. I had about ten cups of tea! It was nice, and his wife was very nice.

So we went to Thornlie Mosque. I was wandering around there and I met this other brother, and he said "I know you". And I said "You know me?" And it was Brother Rais who I had known at university back in 1967. He was there. I

remembered that I was at my Mum's once and she had been burnt and was in hospital and he took me there to meet her. I nearly cried because he was such a nice person and I hadn't seen him for so long. Then I met some of the other brothers. I felt good you know, it was all men, ladies were one side and we were just having a yarn.

I'm not trying to put other churches down, but I feel better about this one. When you've got the ladies and men altogether, you don't know what's going on. a lot of things happen in Churches! When you are with the Muslim brothers you know where you are, you find a place where you belong, and I felt that this is what I want, what I need in my life. So I went there for a time, and I said, "Well I want to do this for my-self", and I became a Muslim.

In the Qur'an, Jesus and the Prophets were not forgotten. I haven't forgotten the followers of Allah, because they are all still in there. What I read in the Bible is still here in the Qur'an, and it makes me happy, it makes me feel good. Like it says in the Qur'an:

"Say: 'We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets, from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another among them, and to God do we bow our will (in Islam).' " 3:84.

The pattern of Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) is something I need in my life. I read about his life, things he'd done and I feel free now, much freer than I used to feel.

I used to go to the Churches, and I don't know what sort of under arm deodorant I used to wear, but no-body used to sit next to me. I'd say "gee" and feel a little bit shy, but I didn't worry. I don't care what people are, I love them, because the Creator made them. He managed to love everybody and if you can't love somebody with your heart, you can't love Allah.

It was related that Anas ibn Malik said that the Messenger of God said: *"Do not hate each other and do not be jealous of each other and do not abandon each other, and, O worshippers of God! Be brotherly, for it is not permissible for any Muslim to abandon his brother for more than three days."* Hadith - Bukhari

Allah created all things for all of us to enjoy, and I love creation. When I look at

creation, I see beauty. I see life. If you laugh with somebody, then someone's laughing with you.

So I'd like to thank everybody tonight for listening to what I've had to say.

Finding My Purpose in Life

Asiya Mahmoud

When I was a child, I had an overwhelming fear of the dark. With my family I lived on a small farm in Southern Tasmania. At night, with the lights turned off, the darkness was all-encompassing. There were no other houses, no street lights to provide a hint of the outline of things. Everything was covered in night. I remember very clearly how I would lie in bed with my back to the wall and the covers over my ears, repeating to myself, "Oh God, please protect me." I felt that for as long as I said this I would be safe. I had total confidence that I was under the care of a higher power, although I had real comprehension of what I was asking for and to whom it was directed. In retrospect, the thing that I find interesting is that my family is not religious. At the age of seven or eight I still retained some of the *fitrah* into which I was born. This natural instinct to trust in God was slowly eroded as I matured and reached adulthood.

Since Almighty God made all human beings swear to His Unique Divinity and Lordship when He created Adam (*"When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): "Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?"* - *They said: "Yea! We do testify!" (This), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: "Of this we were never mindful"* - *Qur'an 7:172*) this oath is printed on the human soul even before it enters the mother's womb. So when a child is born, it has with it a natural belief in God. This natural belief is called in Arabic "*fitrah*". If a child were to be left alone, it would grow up aware of Almighty God in His Unity, but all children are affected by the pressures of their environment.

The Prophet Muhammad - the Final Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace, reported that God the Exalted said: *"I created My servants in the right religion, but the devils made them go astray."* (Reported in Sahih Muslim.) The Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace, also said: *"Each child is born in a state of fitrah, but his parents make him a Jew or a Christian"* (Reported in Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim).

However my heart was not completely hardened. There remained a part of me that was filled with longing, a feeling that I clumsily describe as an ache or yearning for The Absolute; a need to surrender to something much greater than myself and my surroundings. I tried to dull it through losing myself in the *Dunya* (the life of this world)

"O men! Certainly the promise of God is true. Let not then this present life deceive you, nor let the Chief Deceiver deceive you about God." Qur'an 35:5

Paradoxically although I was filled with unease, I was aware that hidden within this longing there was the possibility of peace and stillness. I was an insomniac and I would sit up all night enjoying the quiet. There was intensity in the night that attracted me. At 2 or 3am everything seemed more substantial, more real somehow. I felt a little closer to that elusive something which was out of my grasp. Now I am able to recognize that this longing was the product of our need as humans to have a relationship with our Creator.

The reason that I was filled with unease was because this call to worship was an unrecognized and an unfulfilled desire. Until I was able to look within myself and know that I had faith in God, the call to that which was Greater was unanswered. I had to be prepared to open my heart. It seems so obvious to me now that my longing was the residue of our need to worship - a need, which as an undeniable constituent of our human make-up. It refuses to lie dormant and will stir within us and demand attention. Either we have faith in and we worship God or we have faith in and we worship man-made systems. The first is done knowingly and leads to contentment. The second is usually done unknowingly and leads the individual on a deceptive path that is perpetually unfulfilling.

I was on the latter path for many years, continually searching for a means to dislodge the unease that I felt within myself. I was not necessarily unhappy on the surface but inwardly I struggled with an emptiness that I could not explain - a bewildering feeling of loss. The most obvious step, to believe in God was the most difficult step to take, it required that everything in my life be broken down and reassembled. I thought that people were religious only because they had been brought up to think that way. In my self-righteousness, it had never occurred to me to apply the same logic to myself.

Eventually one day I realized that we have to consciously choose our beliefs. I tried to step outside myself and view the world and our human existence with no particular bias. I looked within myself and realized that hidden within my longing, in an area intensely personal and ambiguous, were a few scattered seeds of what could only be described as Faith. This was a part of me, much more enduring than any of the ideologies that I had cloaked myself in previously. I took a deep breath and admitted to myself that I believed in God. Finally after years of searching I opened my heart to a reality that I think I had subconsciously always known. But what was the next step? How was this newly recognized awareness of the Divine Presence going to affect my daily life?

Years earlier my searching had taken me to the other side of the world, to Chefchauen, a beautiful town in the Riff Mountains in Morocco. For the first time I was introduced to living Islam. There was a quality inherent in the people I encountered there that I found immediately striking and attractive; a generosity that amazed me. Even amidst the hectic activity of the busy marketplace I sensed a feeling of serenity, a sensation that everything that was occurring was in its rightful place. It has been suggested to me that my reaction was probably just naive romanticism; the responses of a young woman embracing a culture so different from her own; a flirtation with the exotic! After all I was studying Fine Arts, wasn't it just typical for a young aspiring artist to fall in love with such a place? Perhaps! Or perhaps Allah Subhana wa ta'ala helped me to have such an experience in order to awaken in my heart a love for Islam. The enduring nature of my love for Morocco suggests to me that this was the reason.

When I returned to Australia I felt that I had been changed by my experience but it took six years for this change to be fully recognized. In Melbourne in 2001, I found myself talking to a Taxi Driver as I went home one night. We talked very openly and I was surprised by how comfortable I felt as I spoke to this stranger. I was usually very shy and reserved with people that I did not know. He interested me, I found his manner gentle and he was an Arabic speaker. I did not tell him of my love for the Arabic language with its beautiful sound and the grace of its script. I was too embarrassed as it felt like a childish obsession and besides it was inappropriate. We talked and he reignited my interest in Islam. At first it was a detached interest, but very soon, with a speed which shocked me, I began to feel as if my entire system of living was in question. I became obsessed and every spare moment I had I spent reading.

When I read about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), it seemed implausible to me that he was just a talented man as I had thought previously. How could someone write a book that was both an explanation of and guide for life and also so linguistically superb? I discovered that Muhammad (pbuh) was in fact a Messenger of God. Subhan'Allah. When I look back at this time, I am so grateful to Allah (swt) for starting me on his Straight Path and for helping my heart open to Islam with such speed. At the time however, I was very frightened. I realized that I must become a Muslim and the idea terrified me. I had only begun reading about Islam to satisfy an interest, I didn't expect it to convince me. I felt that I couldn't become a Muslim. If I did so I might lose my friends and be distanced from my family. I was so scared of finding myself alone.

However in the back of my mind I was aware that I had always been alone; that even my close friendships had never totally satisfied me; that I used to dream about

falling in love with someone and knowing them and being known completely. But we can never really know what another person's heart contains and it is only Allah (swt) who knows us completely. When I finally accepted Islam, I realized that I would never feel alone again, that Allah (swt) is "*closer than the jugular vein*" Qur'an 50:16.

But to reach the day when with my will I believed and I said the Shahadah (Declaration of faith), I had to first reach a crisis point. I had found that I believed in Allah (swt) and in doing so I had shattered the world as I had known it all my adult life. I was terribly confused and my faith fluctuated. I felt as though I was at war with myself. I knew in my heart that Islam was the correct path to take but my self, my nafs (soul), fought against this every step of the way. My heart wanted to submit but my will was not ready.

"Therefore, when there comes the great, overwhelming (Event) - The Day when man shall remember (all) that he strove for, and Hell-Fire shall be placed in full view for (all) to see, - Then, for such as had transgressed all bounds, And had preferred the life of this world, The Abode will be Hell-Fire; And for such as had entertained the fear of standing before their Lord's (tribunal) and had restrained (their) soul from lower desires, Their abode will be the Garden" Qur'an 79:34-41.

I was full of anger! It seemed to me that I was the only person in the world struggling with understanding of the meaning of our existence. I attacked myself for thinking about it! My cynicism told me it was adolescent, that we should 'grow out' of searching for the meaning of life. But I was unable to grow out of it, and it had become absolutely crucial to me to know my purpose in life.

One morning I woke up in tears, I cried all day and then for the first time since childhood I asked God to help me. I opened the Qur'an and I read: *"Allah! There is no god but He - the Living, The Self-subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him Nor Sleep. His are all things In the heavens and on earth. Who is there can intercede In His presence except As he permitteth? He knoweth What (appeareth to His creatures As) Before or After or Behind them. Nor shall they compass Aught of his knowledge Except as He willeth. His throne doth extend Over the heavens And on earth, and He feeleth No fatigue in guarding And preserving them, For He is the Most High. The Supreme (in glory)."* Qur'an 2: 255

It was at this moment that I felt myself submit and all my anger and frustration washed away. I knew in my heart that I was a Muslim and my will was no longer contradicting this. I felt total all-encompassing relief. Later I learnt that the verse I had read is called *The verse of the Throne* and it is one of the most important verses

in the entire Qur'an. Subhan'Allah!

I saw on Islam-Australia (www.islam-australia.net) website that there was a series of lectures due to start at the University of Melbourne. The series was led by a male revert to Islam. I attended and I felt wonderful to be amongst so many Muslims. I said my Shahadah and I was very moved by both my own expression of faith of the reactions of the women surrounding me. I especially remember one young sister who held my hand and with tears in her eyes - she touched her heart. It was a beautiful welcome into Islam and Alhamdulillah I have now been a Muslim for almost two years.

* * *

My first year was very challenging. Several long term friendships of mine broke down and those that I retained changed their dynamic. My outward behaviour changed substantially and most of the people that I knew found it very difficult to accept these changes and this caused a distancing from people I had been very close to. I felt very isolated and although I did attend some classes and met some sisters who were very focused in their Islam and very kind, I felt out of place because I was not yet fully at peace within myself. I longed to make friends with other sisters but I was not yet ready to step out of my introspection. I had gone through such a great change and I needed to settle into my newly chosen life and to learn and feel comfortable with my role as a Muslim woman. So I stayed at home and in my spare time I read books and asked for help and guidance.

Subhan'Allah, during this time I had maintained contact with my Taxi Driver and I had grown to trust him completely. I had never met a man with so much patience. He endured a great deal with me during those first months! He supported me constantly and continually nudged me in the right direction. I discovered that I had fallen in love with him and I was overjoyed when he asked me to marry him. Alhamdulillah, we now have a baby girl, Ruqaiya Iman and she is a source of much happiness for both of us. I am so pleased for her that she has been born into a Muslim family and that she will know from the beginning her purpose in life. Insha'Allah I will be a good mother and wife. I am grateful that Allah (swt) took me out of my life as it was and guided me upon his Siraatal Mustaqeem. (The Straight Path).

*"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,
The Beneficent, the Merciful.
Master of the Day of Judgment.*

*Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help.
Show us the straight path...."*

Glorious Qur'an - Surah Al Fatiha (The Opening)

I am now at peace with myself within Islam and I feel a completeness that I once did not think possible. All the unease has passed away into nothingness and the longing I once felt, has now been transformed into a desire to worship properly and to please Allah (swt). I feel incredibly fortunate and that is why I decided to tell the story of how Allah (swt) brought me into Islam. I read many revert stories when I was first thinking about becoming a Muslim and they made me feel less alone.

My advice to people who are considering embracing Islam is to persevere! Some things may seem insurmountably difficult at the beginning, but Alhamdulillah if you persist in your search and earnestly seek Allah's help then Insha'Allah the difficulties will eventually subside and you will find yourself in the most beautiful Deen (way of life), the only way of life in which our human potential can be fully recognized.

All praise is for Allah, Lord of the Worlds, The Awakener and The Giver of Peace.

My Experience in Embracing Islam

Rahul - a Western Australian Overseas Student

Ever since I was young I have had this special kind of attraction towards Allah (swt). I had not been exposed to any other religions as much as I had been exposed to Islam. A great number of my friends back home were Muslims, and the house we live in is surrounded by four mosques and all our neighbours are Muslims.

This has, over time, led me more towards Islam, and my interest in it had been gradually developing, until the point when I really wanted to be part of the Muslim community and to be able to pray and follow Allah's guidance.

My timing of each day had been guided according to the Azan times. I could clearly hear the Azan throughout the day, and that was when I always used to feel that I wish I could also be able to go and pray. So I would just pray from my heart, whenever I heard the Azan. Surprisingly, it was always Allah that I used to pray to for help and guidance. Hearing the Azan had always made me feel peaceful. It gave me some kind of inner peace, especially waking up to it every morning. I truly miss not hearing that here in Perth.

When I was young I used to go to school in a private school bus and the driver, who was a Muslim, used to play a tape of Qur'anic verses. Every morning this became my motivation to go to school because then I would be able to hear the verses which gave me immense peace of mind, and made my day go well, and at times if the driver hadn't put on the verses, then I'd ask him to do that.

"And when the Qur'an is recited, give ear to it and pay heed, that ye may obtain mercy." Qur'an 7:204

* * *

One person that has really motivated me and given me the courage to revert is a Muslim internet friend. We have never met in person to date, but we've known each other for four years. This person has supported me with my feelings towards Islam and prayed day and night for me in my times of trouble, and I have always managed to get through the problems because of these prayers. That has made my faith in Allah even stronger. It was as if He was trying to attract my attention, through this online friend, guiding me to the right path, towards the right way of life.

“Who is better in religion than he who surrendereth his purpose to Allah while doing good (to men) and followeth the tradition of Abraham, the upright ? Allah (Himself) chose Abraham for friend.” Qur'an 4:125

One night in August 2002 I told my friend that I really wanted to be a Muslim, and that I didn't know what to do. This Muslim repeatedly asked me if that is what I really wanted in my heart. I repeatedly answered “Yes”. Seeing that my desire was to become a Muslim, I was told about the beliefs in Islam, about the five pillars in Islam, and was invited to repeat *Ash-hadu anna ilaaha ill-Allah wa Ash-hadu anna Muhammadar Rasool-ullah*.

It was a special moment for me. I was being lead into a way of life that I so dearly wanted. I felt great when I was told that this was all that I had to do, to become a Muslim.

Although I felt that I was a Muslim from that night, I still felt that I needed a more formal way of declaring my faith, which led me to continue in my quest to search for someone that could ‘officially’ guide me in to the way of life for which I was striving.

My quest in looking for the right channel to guide me into Islam, finally bore fruit through my search on the internet. I came across the Islam-Australia (www.islam-australia.net) web site and something within me made me immediately contact them. To my surprise, I got a prompt reply from a brother saying they could help me.

At this point I felt as if Allah (swt) was seeing my desperation to follow His guidelines, and with His blessings and guidance, two brothers from Islam-Australia came to my place and I gave the Shahadah on 23rd July 2003, after which I felt like I was born again. I felt instant happiness and inner peace, on again declaring my faith, and that night I could not stop myself from reading almost all of the literature, provided to me, about Islam.

However, before I reverted, I had this fear in me as to how I would come out and talk to people about my feelings regarding Islam. But since seeking refuge in Allah (swt), and after my first Jumu'ah prayer, I feel blessed by Allah (swt) and now feel I have His strength in me, and realize that I have nothing to fear, except Allah (swt).

It is now over two months since I reverted, and I feel really good about myself. Memorizing and understanding the surahs is becoming much easier day by day, and I look forward to every Jumu'ah prayer, as the feeling of praying with fellow brothers is very special and brings me inner peace. I personally feel a sense of belonging,

and feel much safer and more secure after reverting. Also being accepted in Islam, is definitely the most positive turn in my life.

It was related that Abu Musa said that the Messenger of God (Prayers and peace be upon him) said: *"A believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts enforce each other."* Hadith - Muslim

It is my sincere request to all brothers and sisters in Islam, to encourage and give confidence to anyone who they see showing an interest in joining this 'way of life', but who may be reluctant to do so, thinking that they might be rejected or laughed at. Give these people confidence, and show them that they will be warmly welcomed, just like I was.

May Allah (swt) bless you and guide you.

From Ignorance to Islam

Anonymous

My upbringing did not really include anything about God. I was christened, although I am not sure why. I would guess that this happened as it was the 'done thing' in my family. In addition I have vague memories of going to Sunday school, and of course the religious education later at school, which could be re-named 'Christian education' as no other religions ever got a look in.

Without any firm religious values, I lived my life according to my own set of moral values. Basically I just used to drift from one point of view to the next, and do my best to 'fit in' with whichever group of people I was with. I did have a belief in God, although I have to admit that I did not do a lot about it.

Then I met a Muslim. This opened new channels of discussions, and re-kindled the flame of my belief in God. Many a conversation took place on all sorts of topics, the existence of God, Heaven and Hell, other religions, the Prophet and his Family; even topics such as to what was the point of dinosaurs, and aliens. Everything was a muddle in my mind, question after question I asked, and to each question there was an answer that satisfied it. I was confused though, if this religion was so correct, why hadn't I heard about it already? What about all the kinds of people I had met that were not Muslims - surely their good deeds would count? Why do you have to become a Muslim if you live your life properly, i.e. do not steal, commit adultery etc. etc.?

As time passed I soon realised that I was just searching for excuses. I knew that Islam was correct, but I needed to dig deep to find the courage to change. No longer could I hide behind a wall of questions and 'what ifs'. It was time to stand up and be part of something that I believed in.

I was very nervous, every few minutes my stomach churned, waves of adrenalin rushed through my body. It was the night that I would declare myself a Muslim and change the rest of my life. I was sure about my decision to revert, but scared at the prospect at the same time; conflicting emotions and feelings taking it in turns to pop into my head, but all along I knew that Truth would win.

"Perfected is the Word of thy Lord in truth and justice. There is naught that can change His words. He is the Hearer, the Knower." Qur'an 6:115

The time had come, we gathered in a group. I repeated everything that the

Imam said to me, I hung onto every syllable and repeated as best I could, I was afraid that if I didn't pronounce the Arabic words properly then my declaration would not count, and it had to count! I went into a kind of dream world, feeling as if this wasn't really me, I was watching someone else. The emotions started to rise, I looked around and realised that I was not alone with my tears. My declaration was touching the hearts of those around me. The Imam then said a number of prayers for me and also for my family, I felt somehow indebted to him, I felt the need to repay him in some way for what he had enabled me to become.

Tears continued to roll as this pious Imam asked me to pray for him that night. How could one of my prayers be worth anything when compared to his? We shared a cup of water, I was allowed to drink first, followed by all my good friends, and I was now part of what they stood for. I had been accepted.

From that point onwards I was a Muslim, not only had this been witnessed by those around me, but also by all the Prophets who, I was told, grace every declaration with their presence. I felt so honoured that I could hardly believe it.

The final part of the transformation was to wash. I needed to purify myself and all my sins would now be forgiven, as if they had been washed down the plughole with the soapy water. It was as if I had just been born; from now on it would be up to me.

It was related that Abu Huraira said that The Messenger of God (prayers & peace be upon him) said:

"When a servant washes his face every sin he thought of doing will be washed away from his face with the water, or with the last drop of water, and when he washes his hands every sin they committed will be erased from his hands by the water, or with the last drop of water, and when he washes his feet, every sin his feet have walked towards will be washed away with the water, or with the last drop of water, so that he will emerge pure from all sin."

Hadith - Muslim

The world now appeared differently to me. I noticed aspects of people that I had missed before, I was much more aware of good and evil around me. I could look back at my past and it really felt as if that wasn't me at all. I had a feeling that I had been given a whole new life, and I had been detached from my previous actions. This carried with it a responsibility, a desire not to blemish my new clean record. I had so much to learn, so much to read and take in. I had to be different towards people at work and even my own family. I had to get rid

of clothes, books and pictures, now that I had been purified I had to make an attempt to purify my surroundings.

With the help I have had from Allah, I have now found the true path, and take the Prophet and his Family as my examples to follow. I must try and remember them with my every thought. My only wish now is that they may remember me on the Day of Judgement.

Yusef's Story

as related to Insight with their kind permission*

"Never said I to them aught except what Thou didst command me to say, to wit, 'Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord' and I was a witness over them whilst I dwelt amongst them; when Thou didst take me up Thou wast the Watcher over them, and Thou art a Witness to all things. "

Glorious Qur'an 5:117

He was born in the land of the Mid-night Sun, close to the Arctic region which had been part of the viking kingdom. The surrounding seas had been home to the longboats; and centuries of pagan ritual, and the worship of many gods had been part of his heritage before Christianity had entered the Scandinavian peninsular.

He had been born into a family which had strong Christian ties and his father was a Christian minister. As time went by he, too, felt the urge to serve God in this way, but his thoughts were of those who had so little knowledge of Jesus Christ (pbuh) and his way, and so it was that he determined in his heart to become a missionary.

He followed his chosen pathway, becoming more and more involved with the Church. As time went by he taught Sunday School, then moved on to study at a Christian seminary. After completing his studies he married a beautiful young woman, also the child of a Christian minister of religion. His young wife was one of the younger children of a large family, and most of her siblings had already become either Missionaries or Evangelists.

The religion they followed was fundamentalist Protestant, which had been imported some years before from America. There was no half-way. Jesus was the Son of God and God; Trinity was a condition of belief. They lived impeccably moral lives neither smoking nor drinking; no gambling or laxity in sexual matters clouded their system of belief. They were true to all that they knew of the teachings of their Master.

After graduating from his Theological course, he and his wife were delighted to receive word that they had been selected to go to Pakistan as missionaries. How very different it would all be! No more ice and snow; no more endless days, or days woven into night. The cool crisp air would give way to the rising heat. They could hardly wait to begin their ministry, certain that the myriads in this pagan land were in need of the gospel.

Their arrival in Pakistan was everything they had imagined, with vast numbers of

people whose ways and lives were so very different to theirs. However, they soon began to find that the Islam they had come to supplant was not going to just go away! Surely there were people who did not understand it, but still they clung to what they knew. Of knowledgeable Muslims, they found that there was something very real, almost tangibly so. The faith and obedience to Allah and their religion had bestowed on these Muslims a beautiful graciousness which reminded them of the stories of Jesus. How were they going to reach these people?

After some time had passed, it became patently obvious that unless they, also, understood Islam, they could never hope to convert its followers. So it was that this young man, against the better judgement of his wife, went to a Muslim teacher and learned a little of the meaning of Islam. However in so doing, he obtained a copy of the Qur'an translated into English, in which he was proficient. "Now," he thought, "I shall be able to find a weak link which will enable me to reach these people!"

He became drawn to reading the Qur'an, and instead of finding the weakness he had envisaged, he found passages regarding Jesus (pbuh) and Christianity, which prodded his conscience and caused him to reach for his Bible to refute them. However, his Bible gave him no comfort, rather showing the many areas which were contradictory. "How," he questioned, "could I not have seen this before?"

In particular the Qur'anic injunction struck forcibly: "They do blaspheme who say: 'Allah is Christ the son of Mary.' But said Christ: 'O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.' . . ." (Glorious Qur'an 5:72) And again the following verse: "They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a trinity: for there is no god except One God. If they do not desist from their words, verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them."

Where was his Biblical help? Oh yes, he had been instructed well in the Pauline gospel, but what of the words of Jesus himself? "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. 4:10) "The first of all the commandments is 'Hear O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and that thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.' (Mark 12:29,30)

"Yes, but Jesus does not say he is not God," he defensively thought. So, to the Bible again: What of the rebuke Jesus gave the young ruler: "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but One, that is God" (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:18)

"If he saw himself as God, why did he say to Mary Magdalene. '....but go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my

God and your God.' (John 20:17)?" he questioned.

His studies intensified, and as the months passed by, his findings brought him to one conclusion - Jesus had never taught that he was God or that there was a Trinity. He had come to full belief that Jesus (peace be upon him) was indeed a Messenger of Allah and that the original Message had never changed, that indeed God is One. This was the starting point.

Thus it was that after four years as a Christian missionary to Pakistan, Yusef, as he is known to Muslims, put aside his mission as a Christian to take up the calling of Islam. The way was not easy/but long and hard from the point of view of his kinfolk, but Allah is Most Gracious, Most Merciful, and Insha'Allah this is just the beginning of this story.

*Insight Magazine - the quarterly journal of IFEW (Islamic Foundation of Education and Welfare).

The Answered Prayer as related to Insight with their kind permission*

Nurul-Ain's Story

"When My servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close to them: I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me: Let them also, with a will, listen to My call and believe in Me: That they may walk in the right way."
(Qur'an 2:186)

She entered the mosque one Saturday afternoon. Tall and graceful. I thought, at a distance, that she was probably one of my Indian sisters, but as she entered our classroom I noted that here was another Australian sister. Our class was lightened by her warm interaction and friendly smile, and we were so very happy to have her with us. "How did you come to Islam?" we asked her. "Ah sisters," she said, "Allah truly blessed and led me," and her story proceeded.

Nurul-Ain, for that was her name, had been born in Australia and even as a small child had had difficulty with church or Sunday-school attendance. "Why is this?" she had asked, or "Why was that?" she persevered. Her teachers were far from happy and always she seemed to be the only one who wanted an explanation for what was being taught.

Seemingly her questions were never answered and she lost interest in what Christianity had to offer. She blossomed from childhood to young womanhood, happy in her family life, and a good student. She graduated as a Commercial artist and was soon employed by the major newspaper in Queensland. Her artwork gave her the opportunity to help plan the Queensland Newspapers pavilion at World Expo in 1988. After this she decided that she would take her vacation and explore our Asian neighbourhood.

She travelled to Singapore, sharing a flat with an Indian Singaporean girl, she was not so enchanted by what she saw and was told by her flatmate that Malaysia would be a wonderful country for her to visit and in which to spend time. So it was that she found herself travelling to Malaysia. While travelling this country with a New Zealand girl, she was entranced by the sights and sounds, even the sweet organic smell of the countryside side beckoned to her.

She was not aware that Malaysia was virtually a Muslim country, and was not sure when she heard the Azan what it signified, but she found it very attractive. She was,

however, puzzled by all the tiny nuns she saw, and said to her friend, "Look at all those midget nuns!" "Really, you are naive," laughed her travelling companion, "this is a Muslim country and those are all Muslim school children." "Is it a Muslim country really?" she replied, but there was no fear or negativity and she accepted it as a fact of life. It was about this time that Nurul-Ain decided that this is where she must surely stay until her return to Australia.

Joining a group of international travellers, she and the New Zealand girl soon became interested in expeditions and mountain climbing. It was during this time that she met Muslim guides and visited Muslim villages where the older Malays could speak English very well. This was not a quest, it was a wonderful time and she was enjoying her stay immensely. Somehow, during this time, she found herself asking religious questions of the Malaysian women with whom she came in contact.

All the questions which had never been answered came tumbling out and bit by bit she heard of what Islam was and what it meant to be Muslim. Although, she sometimes found that there were different sources of belief, and eventually her questions prompted her new Malaysian friends to tell her that it would be better for her to have the Truth from those who were qualified to answer her on behalf of Islam.

Thus it was that this young woman found herself in Kuala Lumpur on her way to Perkim. "O God," she prayed, "Please show me Your Truth, whether Islam is right, or Christianity, that I may take responsibility for it and live as you wish me to live."

For two months she studied Islam. She found that all the questions which had really bothered her were now answered. There were many Prophets mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an, just as she had always believed, but had been told, by her Christian teachers, was nonsense. God had sent His Messengers to every people. He was Most Merciful.

Nurul-Ain loved the time spent in study and especially she loved those who had brought her such a treasure. The sisters were wonderfully kind and helpful and she especially remembered Hajah Raffiah.

During one Ramadan she was invited to the home of Muslim friends, and during her short stay, she noted that there was a young Malaysian man also visiting, but this was a perfunctory glance and she was most interested in her sisters and, of course, asking more questions.

Some weeks later she was approached on behalf of the young man who had also been a guest. He would like to ask for her hand in marriage. She immediately sent

back the message that there was no use in his asking, she was much more interested in learning of Islam than to consider marriage. Being a young man of high Islamic standards and impeccable manners he did not press matters until she had almost completed her time at Perkim, when he again sent a message to her. So persuasive was his message that she did stop to consider. Eventually she did agree to marry this young man.

Thus it was that her family in Australia received the news that their daughter had not only become a Muslim but, in fact, was now to marry into a Malaysian Muslim family. If they were aghast they did not express their fears or any disquiet. Her mother, on arriving in Malaysia said to her, "Ah, so this is why you could never be happy in Christianity! This is why you asked so many questions!" She seemed to realize that eventually Nurul-Ain had found that for which she had been looking for so very long.

Now, after a few years, I look at her and I rejoice in her Islamic joy. She and her very fine husband still live in Australia while he completes his studies. They have two beautiful little boys. They have had their share of problems with obtaining work and settling, but we are so glad that they are with us. Somehow life seems brighter with their smiles and interaction, and we are hoping that when her husband graduates from his course, that we may not lose them to Malaysia.

May Allah be praised for His leading and His very great Mercy in answering a young woman's prayer.

*Insight Magazine - the quarterly journal of IFEW (Islamic Foundation of Education and Welfare).

Islam: My Goal

Virginia - an English Sister

I am a forty seven year old wife, mother of three and grandmother of one. I was born and brought up as a Methodist Christian.

As a child I was christened and sent to Sunday school, even becoming a Sunday school teacher. Both at Sunday school and day school I always came top in religious instruction exams. Even then though, I remember thinking that I wished I could really believe and accept Christianity wholeheartedly, but I always felt that something was wrong or something missing.

Why if there was only one God did we worship Jesus? How if God was not human could he have a Son? Why did we refer to God as three- the Holy Trinity? As far as I was concerned God was God, on his own – Full Stop!

My father's family were not practising Christians but my mother's were. My great grandfather had even been responsible for the setting up of the Methodist Chapel in his village. This was the same chapel I attended and where my family were very well known and always treated with the utmost respect.

After I met my future husband, who told me he was an atheist, I stopped attending Chapel and teaching at the Sunday school. Over the next few years my husband and I had three children, and like a lot of people I followed the traditions of my family and had them christened and sent them to Sunday school. I may not have agreed wholeheartedly with Christianity but I had nothing better to offer them. I attended weddings, christenings and burials as well as some Easter and Christmas Services and Chapel Anniversary Services. Yet always was the thought that I really wanted to believe more than I did; and always the feeling that something was missing.

Having three children my life was always busy and I didn't really give much thought to religion on a day to day basis, but then about fifteen years ago I became involved in local politics. Attending a political party conference, one of my fellow delegates was a Doctor, a Bangladeshi Muslim. We struck up a friendship and would talk, not just about politics but many other things including religion.

I had for some time admired things like Islamic buildings and art, I also liked the clothing that Indian women (not necessarily Muslims) wore – the Salwar Kameez – particularly the printed fabrics and scarves. From the few things I had learnt about

Islam and Muslims from newspapers etc., I could see that my colleague was a pretty poor Muslim. I found out that he only prayed once a day; didn't fast; and hadn't been on Hajj; but this somehow got to me and I started reading anything and everything I could find about Islam.

Over the next ten or twelve years I had periods when I would read extensively and periods when I wouldn't give it a thought. I quickly began to admire the ethics of Muslim families, the way children were taught respect for their elders, the way they all spoke up for each other. I also began to feel the need to speak up for them; it always appeared they were the ones to be persecuted.

About three years ago I realised that I was spending more and more time thinking about Islam and that without realising it I would steer conversations with friends around to this subject. I also noted that I was very slowly changing my own habits, dressing more discreetly, not drinking, praying (not as a Muslim), something I had not done for a very long time. I then found myself saying, "This is ridiculous! I am not a Muslim I am a Christian!", and I would go out of my way to convince myself of this.

I changed my job and went to work in London for the first time and made sure that I always went out with colleagues to bars and restaurants after work; I bought more showy clothes; I am sorry to say that I neglected my family duties; I was too tired to do housework and cooking. My husband and sons (my daughter had by now gone to University and set up home on her own) had to fend for themselves. My Muslim friend asked why I was doing this to my family and I told him about my feelings for Islam, I guess he wasn't all bad as his response was to buy me an English translation of the Qur'an. I was hooked!

"Behold this is the Word that distinguishes (Good from Evil). . ." Qur'an 86:13.

In January 2001 I made one last attempt to convince myself that I was not a Muslim, I changed my job again. This time to work for a West End theatre producer - even more partying! But it didn't work and I quickly realised that I was making myself physically sick. I developed several different illnesses all with symptoms brought about (according to my doctor) by stress. I was taking several types of medication.

One day at the beginning of September 2001 I was reading the Qur'an when without realising what I was doing I said the Shahadah to myself and felt the most wonderful sense of completeness and a serenity I had never felt before. I made the decision there and then that I would find somewhere to really learn how to become a Muslim and to say Shahadah again, but this time in front of witnesses. My only worry was

how I would find the courage and words to tell my family of my decision. I had been married for twenty-eight years by now but still didn't really know what my husband's beliefs were or how any of my family would react.

Imagine my horror therefore and I am sorry to say the anger I felt when I came back from lunch on 11th September to be confronted with pictures on the Internet of the planes flying into the world trade centre. Over the next few days and weeks I would hear people say that all Muslims were alike and that they should all be thrown out of the country etc, etc. I found myself defending them saying not all Muslims were terrorists any more than all Roman Catholics supported the IRA, and were we going to throw out all Irish people? I soon realised, however, that now was not the time to break my news. I decided to keep it to myself.

Ramadan came and I remembered that I had, just a couple of months earlier, imagined I would be fasting. I spent Christmas with my family as I have always done, this year cooking for twenty people. I travelled to Scotland two days before New Year only to spend New Years Eve travelling back to England, as I was unwell. We arrived home with fifteen minutes to spare before midnight and I made a resolution that I would give up my job in London and work part time locally so that I would have time to learn Arabic and really make the effort to become a good Muslim.

I decided to write to two local Mosques. I desperately wanted to learn how to pray as a Muslim but knew that I couldn't just walk into a Mosque. I was terrified I would do something wrong and really offend someone or that they would be really un-welcoming. I got no response from either of my letters. One day however I found a book with a rough outline of a prayer in – I think the book was meant for school children - but anyhow I followed the instructions and prayed. I knew then I had made the right decision. I also knew I had to find the courage to tell my family, but how?

It was at this time that I sent two emails which were to be the most important of my life. One was to a site for new converts and one was to an Islamic Centre in a nearby town. To my amazement they were both answered. Within two weeks of this I was to meet two amazing groups of people who welcomed me into their midst. Within a month I had said Shahadah in front of witnesses as I had hoped for.

"This is the true account: There is no god except God; and God-He is indeed the Exalted in Power, the Wise" Qur'an 3:62.

I was now a Muslim and somehow I had to find a way of telling my family. I now had a son-in-law a Jewish son-in-law in fact - albeit non-practising; and a grandson

as well as my own children. One evening when I was reading the Qur'an, before I had had a chance to tell my husband, he asked when I was going to change my faith. He was very shocked to begin with, but we talked and I told him how happy I felt and that I hoped he would try to understand and to find out why I had come to this decision. I think he has coped amazingly well especially as I had felt a need to wear hijab almost immediately; probably because it has taken me so many years to get this far.

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigour, or children who know naught of women's nakedness... . And turn unto Allah together, O believers, in order that ye may succeed." Qur'an 24:31

My children seem to have accepted the changes I have made, although like their father they find the wearing of Hijab rather strange, but they are persevering and have actually commented on how much happier and relaxed I seem.

My son-in-law has actually been the one who has, so far, shown the most interest; asking questions about various aspects, and although he has reservations about explaining to my grandson why I wear a scarf and his own mother doesn't, he is trying hard to be accepting. Sadly it has been my daughter who is most against it. Unfortunately some years ago she had a relationship of her own with a Muslim guy who didn't treat her very well and I feel this has coloured her judgement.

As for my husband - we have now talked and I have found that his own beliefs are not that dissimilar to my own, but he just believes that religion should be private and that in this modern age we should keep our beliefs to ourselves and not go out of our way to make our beliefs obvious to others i.e. wearing Hijab.

Slowly our lives are changing. There are those who say I should move quicker, that I can't do this or that any more, but I know my family and if I want them to accept Islam for themselves I know I have to be patient.

"Our Lord! In Thee do we trust, and to Thee do we turn in repentance; to Thee is our final Goal. Our Lord! Make us not a (test and) trial for the Unbelievers, but forgive us, our Lord! For Thou art Exalted in Might, The Wise." Qur'an 60:4,5

My Way To Islam

Julie Warwar

My introduction to Islam came at the age of 15, from my Muslim boyfriend. I never had any doubts about my Catholic religion; I just followed blindly what I was taught. However, slowly over time, my boyfriend told me things about Islam. At first it was very heavy information to take in. (i.e. Jesus was not the son of God; he didn't die on the cross etc.).

Deep down I knew that what he was telling me sounded very logical, especially about not associating anyone with God. but I still had no intention of changing the religion my parents had raised me in. As time passed I started realising there was truth in what he was saying, and I slowly started following in small steps.

My first step was by not associating Jesus as the son of God, and realising that Islam followed the traditions and teachings of what I thought were only *Christian* apostles - but Muslims followed them too.

"He hath forbidden you only carrion, and blood, and swine flesh, and that which hath been immolated to (the name of) any other than Allah. But he who is driven by necessity, neither craving nor transgressing, it is no sin for him. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful." Qur'an 2:173

Then I stopped eating products that contained pork, and made sure that I never touched alcohol. I followed slowly like this for a few years, whilst trying to learn what I could through reading and researching.

"O ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside in order that ye may succeed." Qur'an 5:90

It took me many years to finally revert to Islam. Not because I doubted what I was learning, but for two reasons - firstly because I was afraid of what my family would think, and secondly because I wanted to be confident that I was doing this because it was what I truly believed in and not what my boyfriend wanted me to believe in. Finally all I had learned over the years fell into place, and made sense, as a whole religion rather than bits and pieces.

However, my family were disappointed and thought I was only doing this because

my boyfriend was forcing me into it. When I explained the situation to them, and they realised that I was reverting because that was what I truly believed in, even though they were still heartbroken, they knew they were not going to lose me, and did not disown me, over it.

Alhamdulillah I am now happily married, to my then-boyfriend, we are both practising Muslims and very strong in our belief.

I now wear the hijab proudly, and with the help of Allah. One day, Insha'Allah, I will have the strength to help my sister and parents towards the straight path of Islam.

Although I must say my way to the hijab took a bit longer..... It is now a few years since I came to Islam.

It was related that Abu Huraira said that the Prophet (Prayers and peace be upon him) said: "*Modesty only brings good.*" Hadith - Bukhari

I knew as a Muslim woman that it was compulsory for me to wear the hijab, and it's not that I didn't want to, but I was afraid to; afraid that my family wouldn't accept me, and that I would lose the respect of my peers and work colleagues. A bad trait of mine is worrying more about the opinions of others, rather than doing what I know is right and what I want.

Three years came and went, and although I wanted to put the hijab on, I wanted reassurance that everything would be ok. At this time I was introduced, through a teacher of mine, to another Australian revert, who wears the hijab. She told me her story, of how she lived in a very Australian community and one day knew she had to put on the hijab, by doing so, she lost a lot of people she thought were friends but her family were also very unsupportive. I knew in my heart that my friends were all encouraging and my family as much as they may be disappointed, would never disown or disrespect me. By hearing of her struggle, I couldn't understand how I was so afraid of something I knew was the right thing to do.

I live in a very multicultural society and with a large Muslim population, so I knew I wouldn't have the reaction of shock that my friend received. It was then that I knew I had to wake up to reality, that is, to be afraid of the One Who Created me and The One Who is going to Judge me when the time comes. It was like a wave of strength that came over me.

"Have We not expanded thee thy breast? And removed from thee Thy burden, the

which did gall thy back? - And raised high the esteem (in which) thou (art held)? So verily, with every difficulty there is relief; Verily with every difficulty there is relief. Therefore, when thou art free (from thine immediate task), still labour hard, And to thy Lord turn (all) thy attention. " Qur'an 94th Surah.

Over the next few weeks I told everyone I felt that they should know that I was planning to wear the hijab, before I put the hijab on. It was very nerve wracking but I knew I couldn't go back now. The funny thing was that I told my husband second last. I knew that if I told him first that he'd get excited and try to rush me, and I felt stronger doing it at my own pace.

When I told him, I have never seen anyone look at me as proudly as he did at that moment. A few days later I finally put the hijab on; I stepped out for work in a nervous sweat. For months I felt as if everyone was staring at me, but I held my head high and knew that Allah (swt) was on my side.

Unlike what I thought, every thing went smoothly. Everyone I knew supported me. I had worked myself up into a nervous wreck for so long over something I knew Allah (swt) would help me through.

Now, eighteen months later, I have found this new courage, strength and energy within myself that I didn't have before. I still take others into consideration, but I no longer let others influence me negatively or to the point where I hide my beliefs. I feel that my life has changed for the better; I am now a much stronger person. I wouldn't change anything, and am very proud of myself.

I hope that the story of my journey to wearing the hijab encourages those who feel nervous about putting it on; to have faith in themselves, and mostly in the Strength and Mercy of Allah (swt).

"As for those who believe in Allah, and hold fast unto Him, them He will cause to enter into His mercy and grace, and will guide them unto Him by a straight road. " Qur'an 4:175

A Miraculous Journey to Islam Recounted in a letter

Shifa Mustapha

"And say not of those who are slain in the way of Allah: 'They are dead.' Nay, they are living, though ye perceive (it) not."

Qur'an 2:154

* * *

Dear Robert,

Your family and mine have been friends for many years, and I know that it disturbs you that I have become a Muslim. In particular you are very anti-Islam because of the teachings related to the Martyrs. You have said it is an insidious and evil teaching - the belief that martyrs do not really die. Of course I have to tell you that I believe it absolutely, and there have been some remarkable instances which have strengthened my belief in the Qur'anic text totally.

Let me tell you what I mean:

There was an interesting case about ten years back when an Imam phoned me and asked would I interview an Australian man who had become Muslim and claimed to have come through a very strange circumstance.

When I made contact with this man I discovered that he was about fifty years of age. He was married to a Spanish Catholic woman and had two sons. He had recently come to Queensland from another state.

Anyhow, as he put it, he went to bed one night nominally Christian, and awoke, the next day, a Muslim!

On questioning him I discovered that he had lost his father during World War II when he was five years of age. When told of this he had sat quietly and spoken to God, saying, "My father is dead, will you be my father now?"

At first this was a comfort to him and he shared his news and feelings with God. But over the years his life altered and he had almost forgotten his earlier request to God - to take the place of his Father. There was nothing unusual about his life. He went through his schooling and eventually took up a trade. He married and had children.

Nothing spectacular at all had happened in the intervening time, and on the night in question, years later, he went to bed as usual.

During the night he had a dream that he was in the desert. As he looked about him he saw a man wearing Arab clothing and sitting cross-legged on the sand. He recognised this man's great anguish and saw him look to heaven, raise his arms and cry out, "Ya Allah!" He said that there was so much pain that the man wept and as he did so his tears fell onto the sand. Suddenly where they fell a pond appeared. Then from heaven a tear- drop blood red fell into the water and beautiful plants appeared.

Suddenly the dream changed and he found himself looking upon Arab/Muslim dead - he said that as far as the eye could see there were mountains of dead Muslims. It was so real that he felt he could almost have smelled the odour of death.

Then a veil was drawn across. Just as he was standing wondering what was to happen next, it was drawn back. This time he saw all of the dead alive - they were greeting each other and were happy and laughing, and he was relieved and amazed.

Suddenly his dream changed and he found himself outside an enormous doorway. He knocked and asked to be let in but a voice told him that this was a doorway through which only Muslims could enter and he must return. At this he awoke. The next day he was walking with his wife and felt a great urgency to discover more of Islam. In the shopping Centre he saw two men whom he took to be Italians. Suddenly he decided that he would ask them. "Are you Italians?" he asked. "No," they replied, "we are Arabs." With this he asked if they were Muslim, to which they assented, and he begged them to take him to a mosque so that he may learn further.

The eventual upshot of it was that this man became a practising Muslim. In a short time he applied and was accepted to go to Saudi Arabia to study Arabic and Religion. So what can one say to such an event!

Indeed, it seems that the prayer of his childhood was heard and accepted and we are told:

"When my servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them): I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me: Let them also, with a will, listen to My call, and believe in Me: that they may walk in the right way." Qur'an 2:186.

Truly the Love and Mercy of Allah is beyond anything which we may imagine, and

His Guidance something of which we can only marvel:

"....Say: Allah's guidance is the (only) guidance, and we have been directed to submit ourselves to the Lord of the Worlds!"

In truth Robert, I am so very happy that I am among those who are Muslim, who have been very blessed. May it please Allah, upon Whom our very beings depend, to grant you His similar Guidance.

Sincerely,
Shifa.